

What He Offered

by gembones

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Summary: Booth's Therapy #3: his relationships with women. In this 3rd installment, I attempt to answer the question Booth poses in Daredevil in the Mold: why don't they want what I'm offering? It begins with Marianne Booth and will eventually cover most of B&B's romantic history (at least, that's the plan). Thanks for reading and reviewing.

1. Chapter 1

****What He Offered****

****Chapter one - The letter in the secretary****

Temperance "Bones" Brennan stood in the foyer of her house watching the front door swing to a close. She breathed a sigh of relief. They were all gone to the National Zoo: her husband, their two children and their house guests for the week-end, Marianne and Reggie. With travel to and fro, visiting all the exhibits and a stop for ice cream and a souvenir at the museum shop, they figured to be gone a good four hours, maybe more if traffic was heavy. She had work enough to fill every minute of those hours, she knew; it only remained for her to decide where to start.

She had turned toward the living area with the idea of finishing up the article she'd been reading in The Forensic Examiner when her phone pinged: a text from Booth. She knew a moment's disquiet, but quickly realized that, with all the loading of equipment and fastening into car seats that went into preparing two young children for departure, they likely had not yet left the driveway. Had they forgotten something she could bring out to them? Curious, she retrieved the message: *****Look in the secretary**.**"

For a moment, she was flummoxed. Look in the secretary? She could certainly use an assistant to help with the paperwork that swamped her desk, but— Ah, it came to her: secretary, as in the piece of furniture that currently stood against the wall opposite the

breakfast bar. She stepped over to it, and pulled down the lid, exposing against a background of cubbyholes filled with invoices, bank slips, receipts, and assorted small notebooks a large crisp manila envelope with the words Bones, please read now written in Booth's hand across its middle. Intrigued, she picked up the envelope, settled into the rolling desk chair, lifted the flap, and extracted a sheaf of papers held together by a large metal clip.

Her phone pinged again. Booth had better not be texting and driving.
"Got it?"

She pressed the thumbs up icon and "send." She waited to see if there would be a follow-up message but mercifully her answer seemed to have satisfied him.

She returned to the sheaf of papers. The top sheet appeared to be a cover letter type-written on heavy-weight paper. The letterhead read: Dr. Phillip Cameron, PhD. Galvanized, Brennan scanned down to the body of the letter, and read:

Dear Dr. Brennan,

It will, no doubt, seem unorthodox (if not somewhat unethical) of me to address you directly in this letter, but I assure you that I do so with Mr. Booth's concurrence, indeed at his request. I feel no compunction in telling you that, over the months that he and I have worked together in therapy, I have come to feel that your husband is not only a patient but a friend. He has asked for my help in this matter, and I am only too glad to be of assistance.

As Mr. Booth is a man of his word, he has wanted to keep his promise to you to recount what he has learned about himself and his relationship to women, beginning with his mother up to and including the other great love of his life, who is, of course, yourself. As you know, he does not have a great deal of confidence in his ability to express himself intelligibly off the cuff, (an insecurity which I have repeatedly assured him is unfounded, by the way), and so, I suggested that he write down the thoughts he wanted to communicate in essay form, as a sort of rehearsal, if you like.

You may imagine my surprise when, at our next session, Mr. Booth presented me not with an essay but a short story, an allegory to be precise, representing the history of his relationships. The time and thought that went into creating this document were immediately apparent and impressive. Upon reading, I found that his efforts had been amply rewarded: his tale was cogent, well-structured, and, to my mind, moving. Most importantly, the insights we had arrived at together during therapy were reflected accurately.

Having as his intended reader a best-selling novelist, Mr. Booth was understandably concerned about the quality of his writing, and inquired if I would be willing to act as his editor. I have had extensive experience editing scholarly articles and so, was happy to undertake the task. I have taken the liberty of making a number of changes in vocabulary selection, sentence structure and, of course, psychological content, always keeping as my guiding principle the maintenance of Mr. Booth's tone and personal style. He has read my edited version, and given it his approval.

I expect that you will have questions or observations that you will

want to share with your husband once you have completed your reading, and to aid you in recalling them, I have had the story printed out double-spaced and with wide margins so that you can pencil, or indeed ink, any comments that might occur to you. Mr. Booth has a copy of the text on his lap top, so you must feel free to mark the pages up as much as you like._

_In closing, Dr. Brennan, may I say that I am a great fan of your novels, and am looking forward eagerly to your next release.

_

Yours, most sincerely,

Phillip Cameron

_P.S. You will notice that while "Rebecca" is named in the story, the son Mr. Booth shares with her is not. This is not an oversight on his part. He had included some paragraphs about Parker, but as the focus of the piece is on adult women, I thought those passages extraneous and convinced him to omit them. _

Bones was too excited about the remaining contents of the envelope to give much thought to Dr. Cameron's letter, other than to hope he had not translated Booth's words into his own florid language. She put the letter to one side, and took up the first page of the story.

2. Chapter 2 : Women Leave

****What He Offered ****

****Chapter Two: Women Leave****

The first sheet of the document was a cover page of sorts with a few words, well-centered in bold-faced type. Bones laughed out loud at the title and author attribution:

****A Tale of Twin Booths ****

by Andy Lister (with Phillip Cameron)

She grabbed a number 2 pencil from the jar, and noted in the margin: _very amusing! _There were another couple of lines beneath:

****Dedicated to Dr. Temperance Brennan, "my first, my last, my everything" ****

She smiled fondly, recognizing in this gesture an oblique reference to the books she had dedicated to him over the years. It had always meant so much to him. She wrote: _Thank you, Booth. As a matter of curiosity, why the quotation marks?_

She then set the page down carefully on the open desk top, and began to read in earnest.

A Tale of Twin Booths

Anyone meeting the Booth boys for the first time as adolescents would

not have guessed that Vic and Tim had started off life as identical twins, but it was true just the same. For their first few years, they were indistinguishable both in character and in appearance; even their parents could not tell them apart. Their first language was not English, but rather a jibber jabber all their own in which they would hold long, involved conversations complete with jokes, if their periodic shouts of laughter were any indication. In those years, the boys were the best of friends, rarely if ever apart, and when they were separated, each appeared to know, even at considerable distance, what the other was feeling. On one memorable occasion, while out shopping with his mother, Vic tripped over his own feet running in the parking lot and scraped his knees and palms bloody on the rough pavement. At that exact moment, Tim, who had been playing placidly at home under the supervision of his father, burst into noisy tears and would not be comforted until he and Vic were reunited. As toddlers, as kindergarteners, and later still as schoolchildren, the Booth boys went everywhere, did everything together, and there was never, as the song goes, a "discouraging word" between them. They were as happy as the proverbial two peas in a pod.

Then, shortly after their seventh birthday, disaster struck: their mother, whom they both loved dearly, packed her bags one night and was gone by morning. The signs of trouble had all been there "the angry voices, the smashed dishes, the bloody tissues, the tear-stained cheeks" and yet, the twins were shocked and devastated by her sudden absence. It had never once occurred to them that she would leave them. Leave their father, yes, that they understood, but her boys? They both took the news very hard, but for the first time in their life, they didn't react the same way. Vic was beside himself with fury; he felt betrayed, deserted. He would not forgive their mother, even when Tim argued that she'd had no choice, she'd had to save herself, she couldn't deal with the beatings. Tim promised that she hadn't abandoned them forever: she'd come back and take them away someday, maybe soon: they had only to be patient and endure. But Vic would not be consoled. He had made up his mind about their mother, and he hardened his heart against her.

Where Vic was angry, Tim was only sad. He missed his mother terribly, and couldn't stop crying, not even when his brother jeered at him, and called him a baby and a wimp. It just hurt too much. The constant tears got on Vic's nerves, and he warned Tim several times to shut off the waterworks or he'd do it for him, but Tim had to weep, there was no controlling it. Finally, Vic could take no more, and, in his frustration, tried to beat his brother silent with his fists. He was sorry afterwards, and Tim forgave him, recognizing, in his soft heart, that violence was Vic's way of venting the grief they both felt but that only he, Tim, could express openly.

In time, Vic found a healthier channel for his rage: competitive sports. He had lost his mother, but he was determined never to lose again, if he could help it. Like everyone else, his years were divided into seasons, but his were named baseball, football, basketball and hockey, and when he and his teams had no opponent to pulverize, he competed against himself, pushing himself to set personal bests in running, swimming and weight-lifting. As a result of this endless training, he became a physical specimen: straight, strong, lean and well-muscled.

Tim watched his twin's transformation with a mix of concern and admiration, but he had neither the energy nor the desire to follow

his example. He was more drawn to quiet, solitary pursuits. He spent his time reading the graphic-novel adventures of super-heroes, learning magic tricks, playing King's Quest on his computer, and watching TV game shows or animated features like The Sword in the Stone. Vic scorned these pastimes as dorky, and his pale, physically under-developed twin as a dweeb.

When they reached adolescence, Vic discovered a brand new outlet for his energy: relations with the opposite sex. He had natural advantages in this arena: a handsome-enough face, an excellent physique, an outgoing personality and a reputation for being cool. Girls were attracted to him, and he might have had his pick, but Vic invariably fell for the girls generally held to be the cutest, smartest, most influential in the school: the cheerleaders, the brainiacs, the class officers, the trend-setters. So long as the girl was seriously in demand, Vic found her irresistible. He wasn't put off by initial rejection, quite the contrary: he reveled in it. The more she resisted, the more he thrilled to the chase. He bent his not-inconsiderable charms to the task of winning the elusive object of his fascination, and in every case, sometimes swiftly, sometime after a long, hard pursuit, he succeeded. He'd lost his virginity by the age of sixteen.

Vic's relationships tended not to last very long, however. If he didn't tire of them first, his girlfriends eventually grew dissatisfied with him. He had a lot going for him, they allowed: he was fun, good-looking, confident and personable, but he was absent, somehow, and shallow; everything was a joke to him. One night, Vic had an epiphany: he and Darla, a girl he wasn't ready to lose, were having a fight about what she called his emotional distance, and he lost it. He couldn't bear her complaints and recriminations " he had to shut her up " so he grabbed her, and crushed his mouth to hers. Soon, they were both breathing hard, fumbling with each other's clothes, fevered, mindless" sated. In the aftermath, as Darla smiled at him in satisfaction, Vic had a life-altering revelation: having great sex was pleasure, but giving great sex was power. He never forgot.

If Vic had girlfriends, Tim had friends who were girls. Years of sedentary activities and little physical exercise had left him soft and out of shape, with a body that appeared shorter than it was due to his perpetually lowered head and drooping shoulders. He was almost pathologically shy, and was happiest when he could pass through the school corridors observing the action around him without attracting any attention himself. There were times, however, when he could not avoid interacting with other students, and it was during these group sessions or partner activities that girls would discover that Tim was really quite nice. He was a good listener, and didn't lose patience when they went on forever about their problems with other girls, or their parents, or their boyfriends. He let them talk, and if he couldn't offer them solutions, at least he seemed to understand and sympathize with their feelings. In time, he gained a reputation for being that very rare thing in a boy: someone you could trust with your pain, a "real sweetheart." Even Vic's disgruntled girlfriends would sit with Tim and open up about his brother's callousness and flippancy. "He could stand to be a lot more like you," they'd tell him before heading off, inevitably, with Vic.

Tim was no more immune to falling in love than Vic, but unlike his twin, he was drawn most powerfully to damaged girls, girls who needed

comfort, needed saving: the wallflowers, the introverts, the socially-awkward or outcast. The more precarious the girl's situation, the more irresistible Tim found her. During his adolescent years, Tim had a number of very close 'friendships,' but none of them lasted. They invariably ended on or about the day when Tim, after weeks or months of providing a shoulder to cry on, poured out his heart in turn. He confided his own private misery, his soul-deep suffering in the hope of having conferred upon himself the inestimable balm of acceptance and compassion. But after a few brief 'there, there nows' and some half-hearted pats on the arm, the girls would discover they suddenly had less time for him, and then finally, none at all. From these experiences, Tim drew an important lesson: unburdening yourself to another is a great relief akin to pleasure, but listening to another empathetically is power. When Tim graduated from high school, he was still a virgin.

In this period, the twins' relationship more closely resembled an uneasy truce than either outright war or amity. Vic continued to show contempt for his nerdy brother but never let any harm come to him, and Tim was pained to see his brother act like such a jerk but always prayed he would find a measure of true happiness. In an attempt to be helpful, Tim would sometimes take his brother aside and plead with him. "You should be kinder to her," he would say about the girl Vic was currently dating. "Show her you love her. It doesn't have to be much. Just little thingsâ€¦"

"Or, what?" Vic would invariably snort in derision. "She'll leave me? Take it from someone who has a lot more experience with the ladies than you, little bro: sooner or later, they leave you, every one of them. 'Happily ever after' is just for fairy tales."

3. Chapter 3 Rebecca

****What He Offered ****

****Chapter 3: Rebecca****

Having come to the bottom of the page six, Bones decided it was a good moment to stop and reflect on what she'd just read. She was a whiz at understanding the straightforward language of scholarly texts and articles, even those replete with academic jargon, but allegories were not her strong suit and required more focus on her part. On the backside of the page, she jotted down, for future reference, her interpretation of the tale so far:

As a child, Booth had conflicting feelings about Marianne's leaving: he grieved and longed for her / he was angry and hated her. This resulted in an internal conflict that went unresolved and which manifested later in his relationship with girls as follows: he was attracted to girls who, like his mother, needed rescuing (white knight syndrome?) /he was attracted to girls who, like his mother, were unavailable (at least initially). Vic is the active aspect (chasing, seeking out the lost mother) while Tim is the passive aspect (enduring, waiting for the lost mother to return). Since neither strategy arises from a unified self, the relationships unavoidably fail.

She scanned what she had written, and decided she had summarized her conclusions in an adequate fashion. She added page six, face down, to

the pile on her desk, and took up the story once again.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

The college years rolled around, and though the twins were not on the best of terms, they did not enroll in different universities, or even, in choosing their residence hall, opt for other roommates. Whether it was because they had dim recollections of the happy days when they'd been as one, or because they complemented each other in ways they hardly understood, they felt bound to remain together. It came as no surprise to anyone that Vic chose criminal justice as his field of concentration or that Tim decided to major in psychology. They completed their degrees in the standard four year time-span, went on to serve in the military -- Vic as a combatant, Tim as a mental-health specialist -- and upon honorable discharge, the young men found employment with the FBI. Vic rose rapidly to the position of special agent in charge of homicide investigation while Tim, upon earning a master's degree in psychology, was assigned work as a profiler.

Rents in the D. C. area being what they were, the twins decided that, financially-speaking, it made more sense to share an apartment than to live apart. As, increasingly, they began to investigate murders together, their living arrangement had the added benefit of allowing them to take their work home in the evenings. For the first time in years, the brothers found themselves working toward a common goal, and in the process, each discovered in the other reasons for admiration and respect. When they were out in the field, Tim appreciated his brother's physical dominance, his speed and agility in pursuit, his sharp eye-sight and steady hand with a gun while, in the interrogation room, Vic's imposing presence and aura of barely-controlled aggression were an undeniable asset. Similarly, Vic valued Tim's ability to calm and comfort victims and witnesses at gruesome crime scenes, his empathic manner in delivering terrible news to the victims' families, and his insights into the criminal mind. Not infrequently, Tim's compassionate approach to interrogation, particularly of child suspects and witnesses, produced better results than Vic could manage with his more forceful technique. They balanced each other's weaknesses as well: when Vic lost his temper and resorted to violence, Tim was the one to restrain him, and when Tim's over-identification with a potential subject threatened to blind him to that person's guilt, Vic was the one to snap him out of it. All in all, they made excellent partners and enjoyed working together as a team.

The personal side of their life together was another story. In regards to the women in their life, the patterns they had developed in high school remained unchanged. Tim had a number of female friends and colleagues who called on him for a heart-to-heart whenever they felt the need for a sympathetic ear, and Vic had a series of brief monogamous relationships with women who, in the main, all conformed to a recognizable type: they were beautiful, professional women whose careers were central to their identity, women who took pride in being financially self-supporting, ambitious women for whom marriage and children were questions rather than inevitabilities, women succeeding in traditional male jobs without sacrificing sexiness or style, women uninhibited about sex and unapologetic about it to boot; women, in short, who were very hard-to-get.

Vic's most important relationship up until that time had occurred

while the brothers were in the military. Rebecca had been a graduate student at the period, and so not yet proven in her chosen field, but she'd had plans for her future, and those plans hadn't necessarily included a husband, even when she found herself pregnant. Vic had wanted very badly for that relationship to work out, and not only for the sake of the child. He was happier with Rebecca than he had been with any of his previous flames, and he really thought he could put his days of chasing skirt behind him, if she would agree to be his wife.

But Rebecca fell prey to the same niggling dissatisfaction that all Vic's women experienced. Like so many of her predecessors, she brought her doubts and sense of vague disquiet to Tim. "I just don't understand him!" she told her lover's twin. "It's like he's not wholly present, not fully engaged. I sometimes feel I can't get through to him. He listens, but he doesn't really hear me. Do you know what I mean? There's so much I love about him: he's handsome, attentive, reliable, fun-loving, sexyâ€¦" She shook her head sadly, her pain and confusion obvious. "But, Timâ€¦ I hate to say thisâ€¦ sometimes, it really seems he doesn't have a heart."

Tim held her loosely while she drenched his shoulder with her tears. He wanted to tell her that he had a heart which was hers for the taking, if only she'd ask. It wasn't much of a prize, as it was still broken and bleeding from previous wounds but if she would take it into her loving care, he was almost sure it would heal in time. He had no illusions about the attractiveness of such an offer, however, so instead he assured her that, yes, indeed, his brother had a heart, a very fragile heart that was guarded about with a hard, protective shell; that was the heart he offered her, a very real, beating heart. She would need patience and persistence to break through the barrier, but Tim was practically certain it could be done.

Perhaps Rebecca did not feel up to the challenge of reclaiming Vic's heart. She had a baby on the way, after all, a new life already guaranteed to drain much of her limited resources of patience and energy; there was no guarantee she would have anything left over for Vic. Or, perhaps she doubted her ability to endure or simply despaired of success despite her best efforts. The only thing the twins knew with absolute certainty was that she had decided to decline what Vic offered.

"What'd I tell you?" Vic said, bitterly. "Woman leave. It's what they do."

They'd been living in D. C. for a while when Tessa Jankow caught Vic's eye. She was the complete package: a lawyer with a prestigious firm, she had a gorgeous face, wavy blond hair down to her waist, a tall, slender figure, and legs that didn't stop. She was hot as all get-out, too, as sexy in her career-wear suits as in Vic's borrowed shirt. While she often stayed over, she had her own place, and wasn't in the least possessive or demanding. While perfect in many respects, Tessa didn't hold Vic long. He tired of her first, and she was perceptive enough to pick up on it. One evening, she took Tim aside and asked him, "What's up with Vic? He seems withdrawn lately, as if his mind is elsewhere. He looks like he's listening to me, but I don't think he really hears what I'm saying. Are you guys working an important case, or something?" When Tim told her no, there was nothing work-related to account for Vic's behavior, she went on, "You don't think I've put on weight, or anything like that, do you? I

mean, is it anything I've done? Or, haven't done?"

Tim could have told her that Vic's distraction had nothing to do with her, personally. The calamity had already happened, Tessa just hadn't been informed of it yet. That calamity had a name, and Tessa had been introduced to the woman bearing that name without once suspecting she was meeting her boyfriend's ideal woman: Dr. Temperance Brennan.

4. Chapter 4 Calamity Eve

****What He Offered ****

****Chapter 4: Calamity Eve****

Bones took her pencil in hand and circled the word "calamity" multiple times, making the word look like the eye of a category five hurricane, which was only fitting as it indicated, according to the dictionary, an "event causing great and often sudden damage or distress; a disaster." What in the world could Booth have been thinking, using such a designation for her? To whom had she caused distress? What devastation had she wrought? It was somewhat mollifying to find herself described, in the same paragraph, as his "ideal woman," but that flattering phrase did not quite erase the negative connotations of "calamity," which he had after all used twice, as though for added emphasis. She resolved the problem to her temporary satisfaction by hypothesizing that it was Dr. Cameron, in a misguided attempt to add drama, who was responsible for the word choice. She made an executive decision to absolve Booth completely.

On a whim, she turned back a page to the paragraph containing the description of Booth's "type" of woman to see if those of his girlfriends with whom she was acquainted fit the bill. Rebecca and Tessa she accepted as givens. In the margin, she listed: Cam Saroyan, Dr. Catherine Bryar, and Hannah Burley. She decided to add Agent Payton Perotta as well; she wasn't sure anything had ever come of it, but there had been a mutual attraction there for certain. She then compared what she knew of each woman against the profile: Cam? check; Catherine? check; Hannah? check; Perotta? check. As for herself, she could say, eschewing false modesty, that she was the nec plus ultra in each category. So, yes, she could confirm that Booth did have a discernible 'type.'

The tale had previously suggested that Booth was also drawn to the "damsel in distress" kind of female. She racked her brain to identify some woman in Booth's past who played that role for him, but she came up empty. It was no doubt Dr. Cameron's influence at work again. As an author herself, she recognized that, at times, plots required the creation of secondary characters for no other purpose than to serve as counterpoint to the principles. Dr. Phil (or should that be Dr. Fill?) had identified the need for Tim to have an 'ideal woman' of his own in order to maintain narrative balance, and so had supplied one. In the margin, she wrote: good going, Dr. C!

Having no further observations to make, she resumed her reading.

The Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

The calamity, as Tim referred to it, had occurred just over a year before. The twins had found themselves in need of help on an investigation that was going nowhere, and one of Vic's former lovers, Cam Saroyan, had recommended the services of Dr. Temperance Brennan, a world-renowned forensic anthropologist. The information they gathered about her painted an impressive portrait: relatively young, demonstrably a genius, universally respected, a leader in her field with a brilliant career, and possibly a Nobel Prize or two, in her future. If she'd been a professional sports figure, the press would have called her a 'generational talent.' Vic's antennae shot up; this woman had definite romantic potential. Tim found himself hoping against hope that she wasn't pretty.

And, she wasn't, not at all. They had decided to seek her out at one of her lectures, and, even from the back of the hall, they could see she was absolutely stunning: a nicely curved body, round in all the right places, a beautifully shaped head with a strong jaw, a mobile mouth, a straight, dainty nose, and eyes! Those eyes of hers, such a gorgeous blue from afar, but up close, the iris would reveal itself to have one inner ring of gold flecked with amber and an outer ring of greenish-blue; enchanting. Tim spared his brother a look; sure enough, Vic was standing there mesmerized, his mouth hanging open like a lunatic's. And, that was not the end of it: she addressed the audience with superb self-possession, speaking with an authority beyond her years, striding across the stage with obvious self-assurance. Later, when she joined them in the aisle, she held her chin high and looked Vic dead in the eye, undaunted and even somewhat amused. Vic was toast.

Tim knew that his brother's track record with women was stellar, and that he'd risen to many a difficult challenge in the past, but this time, he felt that Vic had bitten off much more than he could chew. "Forget it," was his advice. "She's way out of your league. I'm talking way, way out."

"Yeah," Vic said, sliding back in his recliner, crossing his legs at the ankle, and lacing his hands behind his head. "That's one of the things I like about her. I'm feeling it, Tim. I think this is it. She's a keeper."

"Didn't you hear Cam? Insanity is doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results."

"If we're going to be trading stock phrases, try this one on for size: Faint heart never won fair lady. That's my new motto."

"I'm telling you, Vic. This isn't going to end well."

"Yeah? Well, go peddle your pessimism elsewhere, little bro, 'cause this is definitely going to happen. It may take a while, but I'm going to have that sweet little scientist eating out of my hand. Watch and learn."

"Let it go, Vic. Seriously. Quit while you're ahead."

"Stop with the doom and gloom, already. You sound like a broken record. Say, what you want to bet I bed her before we wrap up the case?"

"Vic, you are a jackass."

"Yeah," he laughed, "but I'm a jackass with benefits."

Tim was glad, at first, that he hadn't taken Vic up on his bet. Dr. Brennan seemed to find his brother by turns irritating and intriguing, but one thing remained constant: she was attracted to him, so much so in fact that she never once noticed Tim trailing along behind them. That suited Tim down to the ground; he was more comfortable in the role of observer anyway. He watched them work together and saw a smooth give-and-take; she showed no signs of snobbery or condescension, and Vic was on his very best behavior, charming, respectful, and flirty without going over the line. Tim began to suspect he had badly misjudged the situation when she inquired if Vic were already in a relationship; she was not only interested, she had made the first move. Vic played it cool, but Tim could see his brother's excitement; it was all going well, even better than he'd anticipated. Vic had this one in the bag.

And then, Dr. Brennan put a foot wrong (or rather, a fist) and Vic had been instructed to fire her from the case. The three of them had gone to a pool hall where, once again, Tim was the odd man out. Vic and Dr. Brennan took seats at the bar, while Tim, alone at a nearby table, studied their interplay. They were so clearly taken with each other; with every additional shot of tequila, they leaned in closer, gazed at each other longer, smiled more warmly. She didn't even seem upset to learn she and her team had been let go. Instead, she welcomed the news. She looked up at Vic from under her lashes, and crooked her finger at him. "That means we can have sex," she said in a throaty voice. It was at that exact moment that Tim felt his hair stand on end.

He couldn't have said how, but Tim suddenly knew for a certainty that Dr. Temperance Brennan was a player. She had sized Vic up as a fun-loving guy, cute, cocky, probably good in the sack; in short, primo one-night-stand material. She didn't need to worry about his feelings: he wasn't a deep, soulful guy looking for love and commitment. He was a good-time Charlie. They'd have a few laughs, engage in some mutually-satisfying sex, and part friends in the morning. No harm, no foul. Maybe, if they were particularly compatible between the sheets, they could arrange another tumble or two, or three, but that would be the extent of it. Vic Booth did not figure in Dr. Temperance Brennan's long-term plans.

All Tim could think was: I have to stop them, I can't let this happen. He raced out and found them just outside the exit door, sheltering under the overhang, waiting for the cab to appear. Yes, she was definitely calling the shots, leaning into Vic, raising her face to his, bringing her lips closer. Vic was spellbound, drunk with liquor and desire. In a panic, Tim slipped behind his brother and said, "I have something to confess: I have a gambling problem, but I'm getting it under controlâ€¦ I feel like this might be going somewhereâ€¦" Brennan kissed Vic then, a kiss that was to be the entirety of their affair, both "_hello_, there!" and "good-bye." They broke apart, she ran off, laughing, to the waiting cab, and, after a last brief exchange, she was driven off into the night.

"What the hell just happened?" Vic asked, as Tim came up beside him.

"Sorry, bro. I had to. I told her the truth about you."

"Yeah?" Vic staggered slightly, blinking rapidly against the falling rain. "What truth is that?"

"I told her you wanted more from her than just one night, that you thought she was a keeper."

"Soâ€¦| what's wrong with that?"

Tim exhaled in relief; he hadn't misrepresented his brother's feelings. " 'Happily ever after' is not her thing, Vic. She's a 'love 'em and leave 'em' kind of gal. She didn't want what you were offering."

"That right?" Vic slurred, as Tim steered him back to the bar. "And, what was that, exactly?"

"Your heart, bro. Your guarded, broken heart."

5. Chapter 5 Calamity Day

****What He Offered ****

****Chapter 5 Calamity Day****

The phone pinged, loud in the silence, startling. Bones really hoped it wasn't a text from Booth; she wasn't kindly disposed toward him at the moment. Fortunately, it was no more than the monthly reminder of payment due from her wireless carrier.

She was glad of the interruption; she wasn't quite prepared to read on. She was smarting; it surprised her, how much it stung her, even now, to see in black and white how much he'd disliked her. She corrected herself: how ambivalent his feelings had been. "Vic" had liked her just fine, but then, as she'd once told Angela in disgust, men always did. Unlike most women, men had use for her as a sexual partner.

In high school, she'd ached to be liked, to be accepted into the crowd, to fit in, but she had never managed it: the girls thought her weird and off-putting, and the boys were repelled by her nerdy awkwardness. It wasn't until college that men started to notice her, and it didn't take a genius to realize they weren't particularly interested in her brain.

In grad school, Michael Stires came into her life, and changed it forever. Handsome, charming, unscrupulous Michael! A line from Shakespeare's Hamlet popped into her head: One may smile, and smile, and be a villain. It had taken her a very long time to see the truth of him, far too long, in fact. But then, as Booth always told her, reading people was not her forte.

As good a professor as he was in the classroom, as brilliant a mentor as he was in the field, it was in the bedroom that Michael was undisputed master and she his willing apprentice. He'd had scores of women before they met, and he was nothing if not generous in sharing all the knowledge he'd amassed. He taught her the exquisite pleasure her own body offered her as well as those she had a right to demand as her due from any prospective lover and the wonderful and varied

pleasures she could bestow in her turn. He would not permit any shyness in matters of the flesh: together they explored if not all the positions pictured in the Kama Sutra, then, a goodly number of them. Looking back, she thought there were probably many skilled courtesans who had been less carefully-instructed in the erotic arts than she. Michael had made it clear from the outset: what they engaged in was strictly of the body, a physical discipline, like karate or yoga. No strings, never any strings.

So, yes, she could make men like her. With her training, she could enslave them, if she so chose: giving great sex was indeed power. And, she had wanted Booth to like her, so very much. So she had come out to him (or was that come 'on' â€¦) and it was all going so well, until he dropped that bombshell about 'it going somewhere.' She had no experience with relationships that lasted, that was not her area of expertise, she would flounder about like a fish out of water, and more than likely fail abysmally. That would not be fair to either of them. She had covered over her panic with a merry smile, and jumped into that taxi as into a lifeboat. But, she couldn't resist that one last look over her shoulder at him, standing slightly off-kilter in the rain.

The next morning, she was thoroughly embarrassed, and grateful that her vicious hangover gave her the excuse to hide her eyes behind over-sized sunglasses. But that was probably not what Booth remembered. With some trepidation, she read on.

The Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

The next morning, Vic had a major hangover and not the least recollection of Tim's confession. For his part, Tim didn't feel the need to share his insight into Temperance Brennan's true character; she'd been fired. Chances of their running into her again were remote. Except, suddenly, they weren't: Vic was told to hire the Jeffersonian team back again. For Tim, the reinstatement was the worst possible news, but Vic was psyched. He burst into Brennan's office, trumpeting, "You're back, baby!" as if he expected her to jump for joy. That was far from the case, as anyone with the least sensitivity to body language would have realized. Brennan was royally peeved, and it didn't help matters that Vic, in his disappointment at her distinct lack of enthusiasm, assumed a curt and imperious tone with her. Later, while the FBI and Jeffersonian techs searched for evidence in the trunk of the prime suspect's car, Vic tried to make nice, but Brennan was annoyed, and said as much. When pressed as to why, she put her bad mood down to Vic's having plied her with liquor the previous evening in order to fire her, but that was so lame an explanation, Vic immediately called her on it. She did not deign to reply, leaving Vic as much in the dark as before.

Tim understood her anger very well. Having had a chance to evaluate what had led up to their fiasco of an evening, she must have decided that Vic had misled her about his expectations. Whether he had done so intentionally or not was immaterial. The fact was he had misrepresented himself, and now she found herself in an awkward position. Knowing he wanted more than casual sex, she couldn't respond to his light flirtation as she had the previous day â€" she didn't want to offer false encouragement â€" and it irked her that he couldn't, or wouldn't, see that things had changed. So, she turned on him, becoming ever more ill-humored, scornful, lofty and insulting. Vic, completely clueless as regards her beef, felt subject to

unwarranted attack, and grew progressively hotter and hotter under the collar, until inevitably he snapped.

Looking back, Tim often wondered what might have happened if he had told Vic what he suspected about Brennan before the three met up again. Might the upward spiraling of their tempers and the consequent explosion have been avoided? It was useless to speculate. At the end of his tether, seething with frustration and hurt, Vic grabbed Brennan by the upper arm and ushered her bodily from the conference room where they'd been speaking to the victim's mother, and Brennan, her outrage at its peak, hauled off and slapped him across the cheek with all her might.

Watching the two of them face off, Tim thought he had never seen two people so livid with each other, two people, who, on the surface, seemed totally different, but who, underneath it all, were exactly alike. Betrayed, the both of them: Brennan, feeling duped, sexually frustrated, and wrong-footed, and Vic, feeling provoked, blind-sided and dismissed. Like Cassandra of old, Tim had seen disaster coming and had given timely warning, all to no avail. He took no pleasure in being right.

"Did you see that?" Vic asked Tim, as Brennan swept up her trench coat and stormed from the room.

"Yeah, Vic, sorry." He gestured to his twin's reddened cheekbone. "Hurt much?"

"Like a bastard. What the hell was her problem, anyway?"

"It's complicated, bro. Like I said before, let it go. Women leave, right? That's what you always say."

"Damn straight," Vic said, moving his jaw gingerly side to side. "Damnâ€¦!"

6. Chapter 6 Calamity Aftermath

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 6: Calamity Aftermath****

Brennan couldn't put the page down fast enough. It landed face-side-up and askew on top of the otherwise neat pile of paper she'd been amassing. She raised a hand to her face, and felt the flush along her left cheekbone. How apposite: his red cheek then, her red cheek now. She hadn't so much as left the Hoover building that day when the adrenaline surge that had swept her up like a tsunami ebbed away entirely, leaving her unsteady on her feet, shaking and weak. She had sunk down on the exterior concrete stairs, her heart pounding, trying to stem another rising tide, this time of tears.

Her wretched temper! She had heard it said that most children pass through a period known as the "terrible twos," but she had been terrible from birth and had never looked back. She had driven first her parents, and then her schoolteachers, to distraction with her stubbornness, hostility and tantrums. The school psychologists diagnosed her as having "anger management issues," arising from the

fact that she was not simply smarter than her age-mates, she had an IQ higher than most of her teachers. No one could keep up with her intellectually, and she was bored, restless and frustrated at the others' inability to understand what she was trying to communicate. Brennan remembered vividly a day in second grade when, during art period, she had drawn a beautiful air-borne craft and had proudly written beneath it "zeppelin," only to have her teacher stand over her shoulder and instruct her, kindly, to change the word to "blimp." Tempe's response had been to tear her paper into tiny little pieces and to send those pieces flying. It had meant a trip to the principle's office yet again.

The schools' administrators had all conceded that Tempe was a child with special needs, and deserved to be in a talented-and-gifted program, but funds were perennially in short supply, and it was felt that providing specialists for developmentally-challenged students was a higher priority than enhancing the education of those who already possessed significant intellectual advantages. They recommended that Tempe be sent to private school, or that her parents expose her to additional educational opportunities, perhaps through local museums or libraries. In the end, it had been Max himself who had taken Tempe under his wing, and introduced her to the fascinating worlds of science and mathematics. Her father, who never talked down to her, never imposed his own interests, never dismissed her questions. Her beloved father, who left herâ€|

To be fair, Max couldn't have known that he'd be leaving her in the care of a series of foster fathers who would find her completely unintelligible, who mistook her unwitting tactlessness for disrespect and her serious questions as challenges. He thought he was leaving her to the kind supervision of her brother, and if Russ didn't always understand her, at least he would never have grabbed her roughly by the upper arm, jerked her from her seat at the dinner table, frog-marched her out of the room and slammed the door in her face, yelling, "Go to your room, and don't come out until you learn some manners," or something equally baffling.

And, Booth couldn't have known that, in succumbing to his own frustration with her, he'd evoked the parade of fathers who had gravely disappointed her. He had been right to say, "I'm not your father," but in that moment, he had been the perfect stand-in for all those other men, and she had lashed out at him with all the fury she'd bottled up over the years. "I hate you," she had told him, the whipping boy for all those men beyond the sound of her voice. "And, I will never work with you again!"

She resigned herself to reading in the subsequent pages that, after Calamity Day as he phrased it, she had refused to take his calls for over a year because she despised him. If so, he would be wrong. What did people sayâ€|? It's not you, it's me. She thought she had that right. The truth of it was, she hadn't wanted to see him again because, on the one hand, she was ashamed of her actions, and, on the other, she feared the powerful pull he exerted on her.

She sighed, and resumed her reading.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

The calamity, besides being unfortunate in itself, had the additional unpleasant consequence for Vic of resonating with their childhood

traumas. As with their mother's departure, Vic was caught entirely off-guard by Brennan's abrupt refusal to collaborate on any future investigations; given their spectacular initial success, he had taken it for granted that they had a long, productive association ahead of them. He also couldn't fathom what had caused her overnight change of face. "I just don't get it," Vic would say to Tim. "One day, she's a sex kitten, purring and playful, and the next, she's a feral cat, all snarls and sharp claws."

Tim shrugged. "It's like you told her: she's cold-hearted."

Vic laughed wry. "That's what you always say about me."

"Yeah, well, the two of you are a pair."

"I wish," Vic sighed. "Tim, tell me the truth: was it something I did? Did I drive her away somehow?"

Vic indulged in introspection so rarely that Tim was speechless for a moment. Then, seeing that his brother was anxious for an answer, he said, "No, Vic, it wasn't your fault. You didn't do anything wrong."

"Because, you know, looking backâ€¦" He couldn't quite meet his brother's eyes. "I could be a real bratty kid sometimes. I didn't mean anything by it, but I was headstrong, and disobedient, and, if I didn't get my way, I made a God-awful fuss. Remember my melt downs?" He stopped to clear his throat. "You think maybe that's why Mom left?"

Tim swallowed hard, and blinked back tears. "No, Vic. If one of us was to blame, it was me. I was always hanging on her skirt, wanting her attention, crying at the smallest cut or scratch. She couldn't get anything done with me always underfoot. It was me." His voice cracked dangerously on those last three words, so he took a moment to collect himself. He had a question of his own to ask, and, as his twin was scarcely ever in a sharing frame of mind, he knew he had to take advantage, but getting the question out was hard. "You thought it was me, too, back when it happened, right?"

Vic let out a short laugh, completely devoid of humor. "Oh, yeah, big time. And, don't pretend you didn't blame me right back. You thought I was the devil's spawn. Don't deny it!"

"I won't, then. I feel bad about it now, though, hating you then. You were just a kid, doing kid things. We both were."

They subsided moodily into private thoughts, each reliving in memory aspects of those hellish days. After a fairly long silence, Vic took a final swig of his beer, set the bottle down on the end table, and said, "Timâ€¦ Temperance Brennan, she remind you of anyone we know?"

Tim didn't try to hide his grimace. "I make it a point to think of that woman as little as possible."

"Yeah, yeah, I get you don't like her. Answer the question."

"Well, give me a minute, then." He flipped through his mental photo album for pictures of Brennan: lecturing at the university, standing

in the bull pen delivering her incredible findings, her pony tail swinging as she preceded them down a dark corridor, her fist smashing into the judge's nose once, and then again, her hand slamming into Vic's faceâ€¦ Tim felt his jaw go slack.

"You see it now," Vic said, with a satisfied nod. "Let me tell you, when she socked me like that, clear out of the blue, all that rage, that invective, it was Dad all over again. I went from flame to ice to flame again, all in short order."

"I'm amazed you didn't take her head off!"

"It was the shock, I expect. Paralyzed me. Used to happen with Dad, too."

"Jeez, Vicâ€¦" Tim was at a loss for what to say. Eventually, he settled on, "Well, one good thing came out of it, at least: it got her out of your system."

Vic snorted, grimly amused. "You'd think so, wouldn't you?"

7. Chapter 7

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 7: Casework****

It was a wonder, now, to Bones that all those times she'd been moved to assure Booth that he was not his father, he hadn't answered: Maybe not, but you are. She had never made the connection between her own assault on him and his father's repeated beatings, not even when they'd reviewed together what he'd learned of the legacy of his abuse in therapy. She imagined that blow on "Calamity Day" must have felt to Booth like being struck in a particularly sore spot, or taking a punch to an already fractured bone. And yet, he'd never reproached her, at least, not unless this passage counted as a reproach, which she didn't think it did. She shook her head; the damage we do, all unwittingâ€¦

The phone rang: call from the Zoo Squad leader. "Hello, Booth."

"Hey, there, Bones. Listen, Christine is trying to convince me she can share her goldfish with Hank, but that doesn't seem right to meâ€¦"

Goldfish? Where in the world would Christine have gathered goldfish? Some aquariums had shallow water tables complete with small sea creatures for visiting children to explore, but she didn't remember such an exhibit at the zoo. And, then she understood: whole wheat fish-shaped crackers. "What's this really about, Booth?"

A silence on the other end of the line, then, "I guess I just wanted to check you're still talking to me."

"That's not something you ever need to worry about. The reverse? Maybe."

"I'm shaking in my boots. Okay, soâ€¦ thanks. No, Christine, Mommy

can't talk right nowâ€¦" Call ended.

Mommy still had a lot of pages to get through, and not a lot of remaining free time. She picked up the next page, and read.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

Vic knew that Tim was right about Temperance Brennan, but he simply couldn't let go. She hadn't given him a chance, not a proper chance, and he couldn't give up without another try. It was not in his character to surrender the chase, and so, periodically over the next few months, he would swallow his pride and phone the Jeffersonian, hoping to entice her back with an interesting case, only to be stonewalled every time by her assistant, Jack or Zach, he could never remember which.

For his part, Tim did not miss Brennan nor wish her back in their life. And yet, he found himself wondering if there were more to her story than he'd suspected. It was Vic's teasing jab about his reputedly having as cold a heart as Brennan's that had set his psychologist's mind in motion. The two were a pair, he'd said so himself; was the resemblance merely superficial, or was there something in Brennan's past, as there was in Vic's, to account for her behavior? In the interests of fairness, he decided to look into the matter, and, in the end, didn't need to look far. It was all there in her file for anyone to read: Brennan had, in effect, been orphaned as a teen. Her parents had gone missing some fifteen years before, and their fate had never been determined. Her parents' disappearance had resulted in the further critical loss of her siblings, an elder brother, Russ and her identical twin sister, Joy Ruth. A legal adult, Russ had gone off to find his fame and fortune, leaving his sisters to the tender mercies of the foster care system. The sisters had, apparently, been placed with different foster families, and had never lived together again. The lack of any further information regarding Joy Ruth and Russ seemed to indicate that all three Brennans had been making their way alone in the world for some time.

Having read her file, Tim could have kicked himself: he should have recognized the signs. It was now evident to him that Temperance Brennan had a heart every bit as broken and guarded as Vic's. He was loathe to reveal his discovery to his twin, but after the harsh things he'd said about the woman, he felt he owed it to Brennan to share what he'd learned. He should not have been surprised to discover that Vic knew the story already, that he was, indeed, vastly better informed about the beautiful young scientist. That was Vic all over: knocked down, but not out. Unable to pursue her in person, he had redirected his focus into learning everything he could about her. He had even started his own personal file where he conserved the printed matter his research turned up: newspaper clippings, flyers announcing public lectures, photocopies of her more recent scholarly articles, and the like. When her novel, *Bred in the Bone*, was published, he was first in line at the bookstore to purchase a copy.

It was reading the novel that convinced Vic to make one last ditch effort to win Brennan back, if not to him, then to the FBI. "You can't say I'm not the inspiration for Andy Lister," Vic insisted, when Tim finally finished the last page and put the book down. "He's got smarts, enormous sex appeal, and a powerful vibe of simmering

aggression under his cool exterior. She based Lister on me all right."

"Loosely based, very loosely. He's probably a composite of any number of people. And, besides, fictional characters in the police procedural genre are functions of the plot, not the other way around."

As usual, Vic wasn't listening. He was already busy devising a strategy to do an end-run around the blocking assistant to insure some face-time with the evasive anthropologist. It took considerable tactical planning and inter-office cooperation, but it worked: Vic finally found himself in the same room as Dr. Temperance Brennan. She made no pretense about being happy to see him, and immediately penetrated his ruse of riding to her rescue, but he had snagged her attention for at least as long as it took to drive her from the airport where he'd had her ambushed into the city, and he determined to make the most of that time.

Despite what he'd learned about her background, Tim still considered Brennan abrasive, and had remained in the car while Vic played out his charade. She didn't seem to register his presence in the back seat when she swung ungraciously into the car and slammed the door shut with unnecessary force. For Tim, it was like watching a replay of that ill-fated day: it started out with Vic trying to charm her, Brennan not having any of it, leading to Vic becoming snarky, and Brennan demanding in no uncertain terms to be let out of the car. When Vic complied, there ensued a literal chase, with Vic running after the irascible scientist and having to agree, if only to buy time, to the terms she stipulated for her assistance. They returned to the car, and the spiral began again: she condescended, he sneered, she mocked, he belittled, and on and on, like cranky children or, which was more to the point, two adults fighting an unwelcome sexual attraction.

That became the pattern for their interaction: Brennan aggressively keeping Vic at arm's length with snide comments and thinly-veiled insults, and Vic reacting defensively with dismissive remarks about "squints" and unsubtle attempts at physical intimidation. In their intense focus on each other, they seemed entirely unaware of Tim's presence when he was with them in the field or at the lab. By and large, it wasn't a harmonious collaboration but, as with their first case, it was producing outstanding results, and that went a long way toward reconciling the ill-assorted co-investigators to the discomfort.

The first time Brennan deigned to acknowledge Tim was when he was obliged to interrupt her while the three of them were at the Eller home informing the bereaved parents that they had recovered their daughter's remains. Brennan had been on the point of telling the grieving couple the unvarnished truth about Clio's painful death when Tim had horned in and told a comforting lie instead. She had shot him a malevolent look, and later outside the house, she had challenged him, asserting that the Ellers were entitled to the facts, which only confirmed Tim in the belief that the woman knew next to nothing about humane interaction. He had not scrupled to tell her that, as well as a few other home truths about her social skills. She went back to ignoring him.

As she had done before, Brennan went rogue â€" at least she limited

herself to threats instead of actual assault this time â€" with the result that the case was reassigned to Agent Furst. In the few hours remaining before they had to turn the files over, Vic, Tim and Brennan worked relentlessly to find justice for Clio. Late in the evening, Vic requested Brennan join him in his office, but when she arrived, Vic had stepped out for a moment, and it was Tim she found sitting behind the desk, watching a video of Clio and her family in happier days. Given their earlier testy exchange, she approached the desk gingerly. "You wanted to see me?"

It was on the tip of his tongue to tell her no, he didn't want to see her, that, in fact, he'd be perfectly happy never to set eyes on her again. Instead, the psychologist in him spotted an opening, and he said, "You don't want to talk about family?" When she didn't answer, he tried again. "Temperance, partners share things. It builds trust."

She didn't give an inch. "Since when are we partners?"

He gave up the effort. No one could say he hadn't tried. "I apologize for the presumption."

At the eleventh hour (almost literally), Brennan put together all the puzzle pieces, and, knowing time to be of the essence, raced out alone to apprehend the murderer and secure the crime scene against destruction. When Vic and Tim arrived, she was holding the killer at gunpoint, a bit shaken but otherwise in complete control. Later, at the cemetery, when the three of them were standing on a small rise looking down at the mourners, Tim brought himself to acknowledge her invaluable contributions to the case. "They would still be wondering what happened to their daughter, if not for you."

She looked thoughtful for a moment, and then, as if she had taken his advice to heart, volunteered the information about her parents' disappearance and the burden of not knowing their fate.

In exchange for this confidence, Vic offered one of his own: he admitted to having killed fifty individuals as a sniper, and of hoping, as a recompense, to remove at least that many murderers from the streets.

In typical Brennan fashion, she laughed at Vic's resolution. "I don't think there's some cosmic balance sheet!" At her scornful inflection, Vic bowed his head, embarrassed, and Tim, seeing it, felt he could never like this woman, no matter how many murderers she busted single-handedly. And then, a very odd thing happened: Brennan sobered and said, in apparent sincerity, "I'd like to help with that." Vic recovered sufficiently to make light of accepting her offer, and Tim thought for the first time that there might be hope for Temperance Brennan, after all.

8. Chapter 8: Compromise

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 8: Compromise****

It irritated the novelist in Bones that she had not anticipated the introduction of Joy Ruth as a character in her own right. Every

worthwhile story needed a twist now and again, and this one had been a downright curve ball. Perhaps her books had been a good influence on Booth. He did tend to read them carefully. He might have picked up some narrative tricks in the process. But then, she thought, no, it was far more likely Dr. Cameron's doing. In her experience, psychologists showed a marked propensity for storytelling. Look at Sweets, for example: he had written what was tantamount to fiction about her and Booth. The rewrite had been something of an improvement, but a flight of fancy nonetheless. If she were given to betting, she'd wager that Dr. Cameron was a would-be author of lurid thrillers with a number of unpublished manuscripts sitting in his desk drawers at home. She decided she would have to have him for dinner sometime soon " she would enjoy eating his liver with onions.

She returned to her reading.

The Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

And so, Brennan and the Booths put the calamity successfully behind them, and set about finding their footing as professional partners in earnest. Dealing with Brennan was, at first, a tricky thing; Vic and Tim knew her mercurial nature by now, and walked on eggshells around her, doing their best not to set off her uncertain temper. After a while, she stopped glaring at them quite so much, and even, to their amazement, offered the occasional word of praise and token of trust. She was still something of a liability in speaking with the bereaved, but more and more, she followed Tim's lead and his advice to good effect.

It didn't take long for Tim to become, once again, the unnoticed third wheel. Watching Vic and Brennan together, Tim had the impression that fate had pushed the reset button: the two of them were back to interacting as they had before Calamity Eve. Vic deferred to her on matters technical and scientific, supported her when she was challenged, and protected her in situations ranging from dicey to merely importunate. In time, he felt comfortable enough around her even to flash his "charm smile" and rib her good-naturedly. Without Tim having to warn him, he was meticulous in not crossing the invisible line between colleague and suitor. Brennan interpreted his comportment as respect for her unspoken boundaries, and relaxed. It appeared they had, somehow, reached a tacit agreement, to wit: he would not chase her romantically provided she did not run from him professionally. The underlying tension was not resolved, but as a stop-gap measure, the compromise worked.

As a psychologist, Tim was aware that what cannot be expressed directly finds alternate ways to make itself known, so he was not surprised that, however little Vic acted on it, or however categorically Brennan denied it, the two couldn't entirely hide their mutual attraction. Vic grew irritable and overprotective when eligible men showed an all-too-natural interest in Brennan. With apparent nonchalance, he often stood too close to her, leaned too far into her, snagged every opportunity to steer her by the shoulders or the elbow, or clap her cordially on the back. Brennan accepted all of this without complaint, even with a certain complacency.

For her part, Brennan showed an unhealthy fascination with Vic's personal life. Out of nowhere, she would bring up Tessa, ask how she was doing, how they spent their time together. Upon meeting Amy

Morton, a perky public defender with whom the Booths had a history, she even asked Vic off-handedly if he were going to be dating both lawyers at once. Listening to this line of questioning, Tim couldn't decide if she was reassuring herself that Vic's romantic attentions were safely directed elsewhere or if she was trying in a very roundabout way to experience being his girlfriend vicariously. He decided it could well be a little of both.

Later that year, on Christmas day, Tim had his strongest experience yet of déjà vu. He and Vic were at Wong Foo's waiting for Parker to be dropped off, and, in advance of their imminent departure, Tim had excused himself to use the facilities. When he returned, he found Brennan had taken his seat one stool over from Vic at the bar. They had assumed the same positions as that night in the pool hall, with more distance between them admittedly, but with the same attitude. Vic's head was canted to one side, and he met her unwavering gaze with a brazen mix of mockery, respect and deep affection. She had outdone herself that day, which for Temperance Brennan, star of the forensic world, was saying something: she had solved a decades-old murder, righted an old woman's crooked world, and gifted the woman's granddaughter with a key to unlock a brilliant future. Vic's look said it all: I never doubted you'd do it, because_ you _are the best, baby, and you are all mine " professionally. The secret pact held.

As time passed, and case after case was successfully closed, Vic and Brennan found another means of cementing their bond: they cut Tim out of their working relationship as much as possible. Increasingly, Brennan accompanied Vic into the field, and if Tim was invited along, they made him feel like a useless appendage. They were united in downplaying the promptings of his gut instincts as "unsubstantiated speculation" and in dismissing his insights into criminal motivation as "pure guesswork." If he had a dime for every time Brennan announced, "I hate psychology," he could have retired to a tropical island before forty. The worst of it all was when Brennan, borrowing a favorite endearment of Angela's for her own mocking purpose, would look at him pityingly, and say, "Tim, sweetie" He could have cheerfully strangled her then.

None of that mattered very much to Tim after the evening Brennan strode into Wong Foo, slid onto a bar stool next to Vic, and set a red file folder on the counter. "I want to ask you a favor," she said, addressing both Booths.

"Jeez," Tim muttered. He hadn't been enthusiastic about collaborating on the investigation into Max Kane's disappearance. "Another favor."

Brennan paid no heed to him, as per usual. "I wonder if you wouldn't mind taking a look at this." She tapped the red file folder.

"The file on your parents?" Vic asked. "Yeah" okay."

Because, of course, Tim thought sourly, Brennan had only to ask for Vic to do her bidding.

"You want to think about it? It's a pretty big favor."

Tim was momentarily distracted by the bartender, and as a result, lost some of the following exchange. The next thing he heard was Vic

promise, "I'll take a look at it, see what they didn't give you, and get back to you on that."

She left shortly after. Vic set aside the Sports Illustrated article he'd been skimming before her arrival, dragged the folder into position between them, and folded back the front cover. The first thing to catch their eye was a good-quality snapshot of an attractive, middle-aged couple. The man had silver-grey hair but few wrinkles surrounding his lively blue eyes and his mouth was curled in an engaging expression, while the woman was a brown-haired beauty with a youthful look to her and a loving smile on her lips: Mr. and Mrs. Brennan, obviously.

The photo under that was of a young girl, aged maybe thirteen or so, with her head tilted to one side as though lending her ear to the youngster whose pudgy hand on her shoulder was directing her attention somewhere off-camera with a pointed index finger. The child had her mother's dark hair, her father's light eyes, and a smile that seemed, to Tim at least, somewhat tentative, as though she was prepared to be pleased but not yet convinced she would be. That smile— Tim had seen that smile somewhere, and certainly not on Brennan's face. It hadn't been that long ago, either. The memory just eluded him. He shrugged; it would come back to him.

Given the foliage background and the blue-and-white striped folding chair in both pictures, the next candid portrait had clearly been taken the same day, maybe just moments afterward. The child was very likely the possessor of the pointing finger, and Vic laughed out loud to see her. "That's my girl," he said, with a grin. There was no mistaking the youthful Temperance Brennan: she was sitting slouched in the deck chair, her arms crossed tightly across her budding chest, her eyes staring blue-fire defiance from under lowered brows and her mouth turned down in a very pronounced frown. "Isn't she something?"

Tim resisted the temptation to give his opinion of what, precisely, that "something" might be, and took up instead the portrait of the girl he now concluded was Joy Ruth. There was an unmistakable resemblance, but he would not have guessed, based on these pictures, that the girls were identical twins. It might have been the difference in facial expressions that distorted the similarities; perhaps if they were both scowling or both smiling, he would see it more. As it was, Joy Ruth looked like a sweet girl— Once again, the nagging sensation of having seen that face in the recent past tantalized him, but no, he couldn't place it.

Vic had finally set down the picture of the belligerent twin, and was shuffling through the remaining documents. "No picture of Russ," he said. "Too bad."

"So, Vic—" Tim was suddenly not as reluctant as he had been to do Brennan a solid. "How do you want to handle this? Divide and conquer? I'll look into locating the sister, if you take the brother."

Vic regarded his twin with a speculative look that held more than a hint of amusement. "You dog, you!" he said, punching Tim lightly in the shoulder. "Yeah, sure. What the hell. Go for it."

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 9: Chasing Joy****

A quick glance at the wall clock informed Bones that she did not really have time to stop and turn back to passages that annoyed or intrigued her, but she couldn't resist. She re-read the presentation of the girls' photos. There had only been one, of course, the candid supposedly picturing Joy Ruth. She could see from the way Booth and Dr. Cameron had chosen to portray "Brennan" that they were setting up a dichotomy to match Vic and Tim's. "Brennan" would display the characteristics of the masculine aspect (cold, rational, aggressive, the mother as disciplinarian) while "Joy Ruth" would represent the feminine aspect (warm, emotional, submissive, the mother as comforter). As an author, she knew that "Brennan" and "Joy Ruth" were narrative constructs, largely determined by the requirements of the theme or plot, and not an attempt to paint an accurate portrait of the individuals who inspired them. Hadn't she repeated that to her team after every new release? And yet, they insisted on seeing themselves in her creations, to the point of offering "corrections." _She_ would not fall into that trap; she refused to take any parts of the tale personally.

That being said, she wondered why the words, "Tim, sweetie" had been placed in her mouth. She had never used that endearment, mockingly or otherwise, to the best of her recollection. The paragraph evoked Lance Sweets quite strongly; she had often directed the cited comments and others like them to the FBI psychologist. Was this all a conscious homage to their deceased friend, a man whom Booth had once called something along the lines of the younger brother he'd never wanted, or was there something else intended? She conceded that she might also have been reading entirely too much between the lines. Time would tell. She turned the page.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

If he hadn't had physical proof in the form of that photo, Tim would have come to doubt Joy Ruth Brennan's very existence. Every trace he unearthed led nowhere. He had enough contacts and pulled enough strings to discover the name of the family who had fostered her for three years: Chase (_seriously?_ Tim thought at the time). Her foster mother "Please! Call me Cordy!" had been an amiable woman and something of a chatterbox into the bargain with, in the end, very little real information to impart. From her, he learned that Brennan and Joy Ruth had originally been placed in her home together, but it had proven impossible to keep them both. Joy Ruth "always the two names as though hyphenated, mind you, never just the one!" _was a calm, biddable girl, a bit withdrawn, it was true, but accommodating, never a moment's trouble, while Tempe, well! Suffice it to say that Tempe was a disruptive influence in the household, and had had to be moved elsewhere for everyone's sake. _But mostly for poor, little Joy Ruth's, bless her heart. _Mrs. Chase had not had a letter or a phone call from her former foster daughter in years, so had no current address or number to give Tim, but she did pass on the names of some of Joy Ruth's high school friends as well as the name of the university she'd attended. These leads, too, failed to pan out. Tim was considering the drastic move of asking Angela to run a picture of Brennan's face through the DMV data base when Vic gave him new hope: Russ Brennan's contact information. A paroled criminal, Russ had been

easy enough to find, but he, like Mrs. Chase, had completely lost track of Joy Ruth, and could tell Tim nothing about her current whereabouts, or even if she were still alive.

Ironically, it turned out that Tim's big break would result from Zach Addy's routine work in the Jeffersonian "limbo." The set of remains he was examining was revealed to belong to none other than Brennan's mother, Christine. An obvious homicide, the discovery allowed the Booths to open an investigation, which gave them access to documents they would not otherwise have seen. On the day Vic brought Russ to the lab to share with him and Brennan the information that their parents had been more than the inoffensive science teacher and bookkeeper they gave themselves out to be, Tim received the crucial missing piece of the puzzle: "Brennan" had not always been their family name. Originally, they had gone by the name of "Keenan." And, that was all it took.

That smile that had so tantalized his memoryâ€¦ It belonged to one J. R. Keenan, a lowly tech at the Jeffersonian Medico-Legal lab. Joy Ruth Brennan had been, incredibly, under their noses all along. Tim had probably walked past her at her computer, in the hall, entering and exiting the building hundreds of times, all without ever once suspecting her identity. So great was his initial disbelief, he didn't immediately approach her. He took advantage of Vic and Brennan's being out at a pig farm confronting Vince McVickers, a criminal acquaintance of Max and Ruth Keenan, to observe her from a distance, careful always to blend into the background as much as possible so as not to alarm her.

At a glance, no one would have confused her with Brennan: Joy Ruth had very dark, straight hair cut in a bob with long bangs that concealed her high forehead and eyebrows. It was hard to assess the exact shade of her eyes from afar, as she wore large, horn-rimmed glasses, but they were definitely light in color. She didn't appear to have Brennan's height, but that was likely due to her wearing ballet flats, hunching her shoulders and keeping her head down much of the time. There was no disguising that she was slimmer, more girlish in her figure, almost waif-like. A ruffly skirt peeked out from below her standard-issue blue lab coat, and a lacy white collar and a short strand of pearls could be glimpsed in the neck opening. One feature she did share with Brennan, and a clinching one: her gait. Due to an asymmetrical development of the hip, both sisters walked with a subtle swing to the left in their step. Biology is not only destiny, but evidence.

Late that afternoon, convinced he had penetrated her real identity, Tim introduced himself to the Keenans' youngest child. She was standing at a computer terminal, holding a clip board and jotting down numbers from the display on the screen. "Miss Keenan?"

She turned toward him, startled, her eyes gentian blue; enchanting. "Oh, hello! Agent Booth, isn't it?"

Tim was surprised into a smile. "You know me?"

She nodded, not quite able to hold his eyes. "You work with Dr. Brennan's team, you and yourâ€¦ brother, I believe?"

"My twin, actually: Vic. My name's Tim." He held out his hand to her, and after slipping her pencil into her lab coat pocket, she took it.

"Pleased to meet you. Say, Miss Keenanâ€¦"

"J. R.," she said, releasing his hand. "I prefer to go by my initials."

"Erâ€¦ J. R., then." Saying the letters out loud prompted a memory from childhood, and he said, trying for a jovial tone, "I don't suppose you own a large spread in Texas, and have a ten-gallon hat in your closet?"

She backed up half a step. "I don't know what that means."

"The classic TV show 'Dallas'? Who murdered J. R. Ewing?" Her eyes grew as wide as the proverbial saucers. "Never mind. Anyway, I was wonderingâ€¦ Do you have time for a drink, or a cup of coffee?"

"Me?" She did all but turn around to see if he was addressing someone behind her. "Do you mean, right now? Today? Is it about a case?"

"No, no," he assured her quickly. "I mean, it's not about a case. At least, it is, but not a case you're working on, not that I know what you're working onâ€¦" He floundered to a stop to see her smiling kindly at him. That smileâ€¦ "I don't usually babble, J. R., trust me. Anyway, a drink? Coffee? Now is good for me, but I'm glad to waitâ€¦"

"My shift ends in half an hour or soâ€¦" She considered him uncertainly; Tim did his best to project carefree harmlessness. "I could go for some coffee, I guessâ€¦"

"Tell you what: I'll go grab the drinks and meet you in the upstairs lounge in thirty minutes. How do you like it?"

She looked at him quizzically. "The lounge?"

He barked with laughter. "No, the coffee. Caffeine? Cream? Sugar?"

"No, yes, and yes." She grinned up at him. "Lots of sugar."

Just the way he liked it, too. And that's when Tim knew: he and J. R., this could be going somewhere.

10. Chapter 10: Consoling the Damsel

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 10: Consoling the Damsel****

Soâ€¦ a second pairing. Yes, Bones saw the necessity of it: Vic had his Brennan, and now Tim would have his J. R. (why only initials, though? That seemed bizarre). This new plot thread was going to make for some potentially tangled story lines; she hoped Booth (or his ghost-writer Dr. Cameron) had the narrative chops to pull it off.

She spared a moment to return to the description of J. R.'s physical

appearance. The haircut she remembered as one she herself had worn for a time and now regretted having adopted, perhaps because she associated it with a sad period of her life. As to the garment choices, she saw her mother now in her mind's eye slipping out the door on her way to the office wearing the very same sort of clothes: the modest white blouse beneath a fuzzy baby-pink pull-over, the gathered, knee-length skirt patterned with vines and flowers, the low-heeled shoes. How had they known? She owned so few photos of her mother; it was unlikely Booth had happened upon one of her in her work outfits. Perhaps he and Dr. Phil had done nothing more than select a diametrically-opposed fashion style to the eco-warrior look she herself had favored in those days. Yes, she decided, that made the most sense.

She wondered how Tim and J. R.'s romance would turn out; not well, she suspected, at least in the short term. She picked up the tale again.

A Tale of Twin Booth, cont'd

Tim was glad to see that J. R. was already in the lounge when he returned with the coffees. She was sitting as demurely as any schoolgirl in one of the chartreuse-colored chairs at the long conference table: spine straight, calves and ankles together, hands folded neatly in her lap. As she had removed her lab coat, he now saw that her white blouse was of light-weight cotton, long-sleeved, and her skirt was spring-green in color patterned all over with cheerful daisies. Tim set the drinks down on the table in front of her, and pulled out the chair opposite. "I hope you haven't been waiting long. Careful," he said, as she reached for one of the cups. "It's hot."

"Wow, it sure is!" She agitated her hand, trying to cool her palm. "Thanks."

"You're very welcome." He emptied his pockets of extra sugar packets, and put them on the table within her reach. "Just in case."

She tilted her head, and smiled at him winsomely. "That was_ so _thoughtful. Thank you, Agent Booth."

"Please, call me Tim."

"All right: Tim." She took a tiny sip of her coffee, set the cup back on the table, and looked at him expectantly.

"Right, wellâ€¦ you must be wondering why I asked to speak to you, and you probably have plans for the evening, so time is short, and I should just cut to the chaseâ€¦" He was babbling again. She smiled up from under her lashes at him, amused but not in a cruel way. "Sorry. Start again: J. R., I have reason to believe you are Dr. Brennan's younger sister, her twin, in fact."

The smile faded quickly from her lips, and she turned her face away. "Me? Dr. Brennan's sister?" She tried a light-hearted laugh, but it fell flat. "Just look at me! The very idea is preposterous. Really, Tim, I don't know how youâ€¦"

He reached across the table, and lay a hand over hers. "Joy Ruthâ€¦"

She yanked her hand from under his, and glared. "_Don't _call me that!"

There was some Brennan in her, after all. He raised his hands in the universal gesture of surrender. "I apologize, J. R., no offense intended. I am absolutely certain, though, that you are Brennan's lost twin."

J. R. lowered her eyes, and did not answer. Her lower jaw jutted out fractionally, and worked to the right; he'd seen Brennan do that, too.

"Does Brennan know? That you work here?"

"No! And, _please_, don't tell her. I need this job!"

She looked so panicked; why? "You're afraid if she knew, she'd have you fired?"

"Yes. She hates me." Her voice was so small, Tim almost didn't catch her words.

"J. R.! She's your sister! She doesn't hate you!"

She shot him a mulish look. "You say that because you're a twin, and you love your brother." She dropped her chin, and her hair swung forward, further obscuring her face. "If she loves one of us, it's Russ, and look how she treated him!"

"You were there, in the vehicle bay yesterday when she slapped him?" Tim could not keep the astonishment from his voice. "We had all personnel clear the area."

"I stayed out of view." She raised her head then, and regarded him frankly. "I'm good at passing unnoticed, Agentâ€¦ Tim. It's a skill I've perfected over the years. It helps, of course, that there's nothing remarkable about me."

Tim met her gaze, and in it, read the truth. "There's more to it than that, J.R. You're hiding in plain sight. That's not your natural hair color, for one, though the dye job is very good. And I bet anything those lenses are clear glass." He nodded his appreciation. "Very Clark Kent."

He had teased a reluctant smile from her. "Wrong alias, Tim. The name is Diana Prince." She set her glasses on the table, squared her shoulders, placed balled fists against her hips, and lifted her chin. "I'm Wonder Woman!"

He laughed. "Yes, I see it now." They shared a smile, and then, remembering the matter at hand, Tim sobered and J. R. followed suit. "Soâ€¦ about your mother, Christine Brennanâ€¦ I'm very sorry for your loss."

J. R. reached for her coffee cup, but did not pick it up. Apparently, she could not trust her trembling fingers. "I knew she was dead," she whispered. "I've always known."

"You have? Butâ€¦ how?"

A single tear, as large and lustrous as the pearls she wore around her throat, escaped her control and raced down her cheek. "She would have come back for me â€" for us, I mean â€" if she could. Only death could keep her away."

"And, your father? His remains were not found with hers."

"Dead, I expect." More tears began to streak her face; she brushed at them ineffectually. "My parents were the most loving, most devoted people in the whole world. They would never have left us kids voluntarily. They were probably innocent by-standers caught up in some senseless violence, witnesses that had to be eliminated." The tears were flowing faster now, but she managed, "Wrong place, wrong time, nothing they could doâ€" And then, she could hold back no longer: with a sob, she dropped her face into her hands, and wept.

Tim was up and out of his chair like a shot, rounding the table and sinking into the seat beside her. He reached into his jacket's inner pocket, and removed the freshly-laundered linen handkerchief he had secreted there that morning. Before he could extend it to her, however, J. R. swiveled in her seat and, throwing herself at him, buried her face in his shoulder. Tim was taken aback, quite literally, but his reflexes came to his aid: as if of their own accord, his arms lifted and encircled her loosely, his head leaned reassuringly against hers, and every so often, his right hand rubbed her upper back. Her tears soaked the fine wool of his twelve-hundred dollar suit coat, but Tim found he did not mind in the least.

He wondered, as she spent her grief, how he could tell her the truth about her parents, a truth so different from the one she imagined. Obviously, she had not been within earshot of her siblings the day before, or she would have heard that her parents had once been part of a criminal gang of bank robbers. She probably also wasn't aware that her mother hadn't died that December day, but had lived another two years on the run. If there had been gossip about the Keenans in the lab, it had not reached J.R.'s ears.

Eventually, J. R. drew back from him and, with a sheepish expression, accepted the handkerchief he tendered. Tim watched her dry her eyes and cheeks, and mused how unfair it was that some women emerged from a crying jag with bloated cheeks, blotchy skin and crimson eyes, and others, like J. R., were more beautiful than before, their eyes shiny with their recent tears, their skin delicately flushed, their cheeks glistening. J. R. wiped away the last of the wet and ruined make-up from her face, and, without quite meeting his eye, motioned with the soiled handkerchief in her fist. "I'll wash this, and get it back to you."

"No need. Keep it. I've got others."

She smiled wanly, neither acceptance nor refusal. "Iâ€" apologize. Forâ€" just now. You're the first person â€" the only person â€" I've been able to talk to about this. No one else knows those remains wereâ€" She shook her head, her lower lip caught between her teeth.

Tim lay his hand over hers where they rested tightly clenched together in her lap. This time she did not jerk away. "I suspect

you've been feeling all alone, unable to tell your friends and co-workers about your loss, and cut off, as a result, from any comfort or sympathy."

"Yes." She nodded, still unable to look at him. "It's been very hard, trying to keep up a good front, hiding the pain."

"Well, that's all done now. I'm here for you, J. R. You don't have to pretend with me." He gave her hands an encouraging squeeze and let go. "You can be yourself."

She turned a searching look on him. "Why, Tim?"

"Sorry?"

"Why are you being so nice to me?"

11. Chapter 11 Christmas Past

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 10: Christmas Past****

Bones placed the page she had just finished on the face-down pile, and hefted the remaining sheets of paper in her hand suspiciously. Something did not jibe; there were too few pages remaining. It had taken Booth some thirty odd pages to reach this point in his tale, and there appeared to be only twenty or so left, with, she calculated, more than half the story still untold. How was he ever going to wrap it up so quickly when his narrative pace so far had been leisurely in the extreme? Or, had he given her an unfinished version? He had better not have done that! She was sorely tempted to flip to the last page, just to confirm that the story was indeed complete, but she thought of her own novels, and stayed her hand. She didn't approve of readers who, impatient with her careful plotting, skipped to the end in order to discover the bare-boned answers to who'd done it and why. If she wanted her readers to respect the integrity of her work, she would have to extend the same courtesy to Booth (and his co-author) as well. That being said, she didn't have to like it. She continued reading.

The Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

J. R. had caught him flat-footed. What could he say? He remembered Brennan's reaction to being told Vic wanted more from her at the very outset of their acquaintance. Likely, her twin would be no different: she would cut and run. As he couldn't risk admitting that he thought the two of them might have something special, some great love, in the future, he fell back on, "I'm a psychologist. It's my job to help people."

She did not appear to find this reply entirely satisfactory. "You're not being kind to me because ofâ€¦|_her_|?"

"_Brennan_? You think all this is about your sister?" Tim snorted. "Talk about preposterous! Brennan and I are like oil and waterâ€¦|milk and vinegarâ€¦| magnetic north and southâ€¦|"

J. R. giggled. "Okay! You can stop. I get the picture." As quickly as

it had bubbled up, her mirth drained away. "It's like that with me and Temper, too."

"Temper?" Tim was almost sure he had misheard.

"That's was my nickname for her when we were teenagers. She called me 'Joyless' or 'Ruthless,' depending on her mood." J. R. rolled her eyes. "Temper never liked me much, and I hardly ever understood her, but we 'co-existed peacefully' as our Dad used to put it. Untilâ€¦"

"Your parents disappeared."

"Yes. She blamed me; not me and Russ, just me. You may know our parents vanished shortly before Christmas. They went out shopping one day, just a few more presents to buy, they said. Christmas rolled around, and Russ, trying to keep our spirits up, put up a tree, decorated it beautifully, and on Christmas Eve, he placed the gifts he'd found hidden around the house under it. In his hurry to set the stage, he didn't check the gift tags on the presents, so it wasn't until the morning that we found that, though there were three each for Russ and Temper, there were no presents for me."

"Oh, J. R.!" Tim's heart bled for her. "How awful."

"Yes, but that's not the point of the story, don't you see? Our parents had gone out that day to buy my presents. If I'd never been born, if Temper had never had a twin, Mom and Dad wouldn't have had to go shopping that day, they wouldn't have blundered into whatever nastiness wound up killing them. They'd still be alive."

"Butâ€¦ that's ludicrous!"

"I agree, but that's Temper: hyper-rational about some things, totally irrational about others. You see, now, why I had to conceal my identity."

Tim had the opening he needed to tell her that the new light shed on the Keenan disappearance had to exonerate her completely in Brennan's eyes, but he anticipated J. R. wouldn't be in quite so calm a state of mind after hearing the truth, and he still had a few questions to ask her. "I can see why you thought a disguise was necessary to work here at the Jeffersonian, but you changed your name legally in your early twenties."

"Remember, Tim: Temper is a prodigy. She was already making her mark in the journals, and being talked about in academic circles when I was still in college. At the time, I was majoring in anthropology, and didn't want anyone making the connection."

"Too much pressure?" Tim guessed.

She nodded. "It was always like that in school. Our teachers didn't mean to be hurtful, but they would look at me and my work, shake their heads, and say, 'I can't believe you and Temperance are twins'."

"Maybe they were stunned you weren't disrupting class, or being uncooperative."

She rewarded him with a small smile. "There was some of that, I grant you. But, mostly, it was 'poor, little Joy Ruth: not a patch on her sister'."

Tim didn't want her dwelling on this sad history, so he moved on quickly. "J. R., I'm curious: how did you happen to choose 'Keenan' as your new last name?"

"Oh! Well, I didn't put a lot of thought into it, if that's what you mean. There was a store in the town where I lived with my foster family, the Chases, named 'Keenan's Jewelry.' I used to dawdle outside their display windows, looking over all those sparkly solitaire diamond rings and dreaming of being offered one myself someday. Silly girl stuff, I know. And then, when I had to pick a name, 'Keenan' just popped into my mind, I guess because of the happy association, and since it had nearly the same shape and mostly the same letters as my original name, it seemedâ€| right. I don't know how else to explain it."

The moment had come; Tim couldn't postpone it any longer. "There is another reason, J. R., that the name 'Keenan' appealed to you."

She looked at him blankly. "I'm sorry. I don't follow you."

"J. R., when you were a child, little more than a toddler really, 'Keenan' was your last name. Your parents were known as 'Max' and 'Ruth Keenan' back then."

"No," she said, with a vigorous shake of the head. "No. You've made a mistake, Tim, or you've been misinformed. My parents were Matthew and Christine Brennan."

"From the time you could remember, yes, but before that, they ran cons to rob safe deposit boxes. They used charm and cunning to gain access to bank vaults, J. R., not violence. Unfortunately, the gang they associated with did, and when your mother gave evidence against them, they sent their hit man to take them out. Your parents did leave you of their own free will that December day, not because they wanted to, but in order to draw McVickers away from you. It was your safety and survival they were trying to insure."

J. R. had listened without interruption, unless repeatedly shaking her head could be interpreted as such. When he finished, she said firmly, "No, it's not true. Not my parents. I don't believe it." She pushed away from the table, stood, and hurriedly began to collect her handbag and light cloth coat from the back of her chair. "Thank you for the coffee, Tim, and for being so kind, but Iâ€| I do have plans, andâ€|"

She began to walk off at so brisk a clip, Tim was obliged to chase after her. "J. R., wait! Please! You're understandably upset. You shouldn't be aloneâ€| J. R., stop!"

She paused, turning only her head to the side, as if lending him an ear.

"Will you believe Russ? I can take you to him. Tonight, if you want. He's working at a carnival not far from here." She did not move, so he allowed himself to approach, cautiously. "You would like to see Russ, wouldn't you?"

When he had come up beside her, she searched his face anxiously, then gave a small nod. "All right, then." He gestured for her to precede him. "Let's go."

12. Chapter 12: Carnival

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 12: Carnival****

Bones found herself becoming seriously annoyed. While she had known, going in, that she would figure largely in any exploration of Booth's history with women, she did not think that gave him (or, more likely Dr. Cameron) the right to treat her as an object of psychological analysis. She was not the patient here! She had not signed up for therapy, and she resented their impertinence in treating her as a case study. All that invented nonsense about the Christmas presents! As an author, she appreciated the drama that twist added to the tale, but she felt strongly that, in fleshing out a sub-plot for J.R., Booth et al had crossed a line into personal territory without her permission. If they did not steer their tale back onto the track she had expected to be traveling, she was going to jump off their narrative train! For the moment, she continued reading.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

On the drive out, J. R. told him more about herself and Brennan. In her view, Temper had always been a daddy's girl: she and their father shared interests in math and hard science, had similar headstrong personalities, were each challenged by the other, and loved engaging in physical activity. J. R., on the other hand, had gravitated more toward their mother: she was mommy's little helper in the kitchen, enjoyed being taught home handicrafts, such as knitting and macramé, loved playing dress-up, and reading Sweet Valley High. The twins hadn't always been at loggerheads, she admitted; they had sometimes played quite pleasantly together, always provided, of course, that Temper organized and presided over the game. J. R. hadn't minded following Temper's lead because her twin's ideas were always so much more involved and entertaining than her own, and besides, it was easier to go with the flow than fight it.

Tim saw many parallels between his growing up with Vic post-abandonment and the picture J. R. painted, to such a degree, indeed, that he wondered if she had left out what had been a prominent part of his experience. "Did Brennan ever hit you?"

She swiveled in the passenger seat and gaped at him. "How did you know?" When he shrugged, J. R. went on, "She was a biter in the early years, but she was cured of that pretty quick. Later on, when she'd get frustrated because I was too slow, or too stupid, she would smack me hard, but it was never a sustained beating, only the one occasional blow."

Tim might have told her that Brennan had not changed much in that respect, but he decided such a remark would be impolitic, and, in any case, by that time they had arrived at the fairground.

Tim pulled into a parking space, and turned off the ignition.
"Ready?"

J. R. made no move to open the passenger side door. "Howâ€¦ how do I look?"

She twisted in her seat to allow him a better view of her face.

Tim wanted to say 'you look every bit as beautiful as your sister,' but he knew that would be premature. "You're going want to give him some clue as to your identity, J. R., so I recommend storing the glasses, and doing something with those bangs. Brush them to the side, or pin them back, if you can."

She rooted in her purse, and came up with a thin, black hairband that she used to secure the bangs off her forehead. "Better?"

With her face fully exposed, and the features free of make-up, she might very well resemble the teenager Russ Brennan had last seen in his rear-view mirror. "Better."

Having met with his approval, J. R. let herself out of the car. Tim noticed she had left her twill coat behind, and threw it over his arm before going after her. "Here," he said, holding the coat open for her to slip into. "It's going to get chilly soon, now the sun's set."

She allowed herself to be helped into the coat, and side by side, they set off together toward the carnival lights. The midway was bright and garish with multi-colored bulbs flashing, and noisy with jaunty music and barkers exhorting passersby to stop and sample their wares or their game. The enticing aroma of fried dough and cotton candy tantalized Tim's nostrils, making him realize he'd had nothing to eat since lunch; he hadn't even touched the coffee he'd bought himself earlier. He stopped at a concession stand and purchased two funnel cakes and enough good will to have his inquiry as to the likely whereabouts of Russ Brennan answered: the ferris wheel.

Russ had just secured the last safety bar in place, and was starting the wheel in motion when they came up to him. Russ knew Tim, of course, having spent the greater part of the previous day in his company. His eyes passed over J. R. with curiosity but no recognition. "Agent Booth. I wasn't expecting to see you again so soon. Not that it isn't a pleasure."

"Evening, Russ. Listen, could you maybe get someone to cover for you for a short while? There's someone I'd like you to meet."

Russ glanced behind him at the people waiting their turn in line, and the people in their gondolas being lazily raised and lowered. "Ride just started. I can give you five minutes, maybe a few more."

Tim decided that would have to do. "J. R., you take it from here. I'll be right over by the carousel, finishing my funnel cake, if you need me."

Tim strolled over to the barrier circling the merry-go-round, firmly resolved to give the siblings their privacy but he found he couldn't resist repeatedly glancing over his shoulder at them until finally he gave up all pretense of keeping his back turned. He saw J. R., with

many a hesitation and nervous gesture, reveal her identity, and Russ go through stages of mild interest, confusion, astonishment and finally, unmitigated joy. He crushed his sister to him, his eyes squeezed tight to better relish the feel of her, his mouth stretched in a smile so wide his cheeks must surely have protested. The surrounding carny-goers, seeing in the dramatic reconciliation something, no doubt, more romantic in nature, burst into clamorous cheers and applause.

Eventually, Russ drew back but he did not let her go entirely. He held her at arms' length and looked into her up-turned face as though he still couldn't believe his eyes. When Tim approached, thinking surely more than five minutes had elapsed, Russ stopped talking in mid-sentence and, releasing J. R., extended his hand. "Thanks, man. Really. You can't know what this means to me. To have some of my family backâ€¦" He swallowed hard, unable to continue, but Tim didn't need words to perceive his bottomless gratitude. Russ nodded his head, a last acknowledgement, then said, "Look, I've got people to let off and on, butâ€¦ Can you guys hang around a while longer? There's still so much to say."

J. R. turned a beaming, hopeful face his way, and in that moment, Tim penetrated the mystery of why Vic could deny Brennan nothing. I'm toast, he thought. He assured Russ that they would clear out of the way so as not to impede the passengers about to disembark, and return when the next group of riders had assumed their seats.

"Thank you, Tim! Oh, thank you so much!" J.R. said, as they walked a short distance off. "I don't know how I'll ever repay your kindnessâ€¦"

"You can begin by forgiving me for distressing you this afternoon. With all my training, I should have handled the situation less clumsily."

"Don't beat yourself up about it, Tim, please. There's no good way to deliver that kind of news. And, what does it matter now, anyway? I've got a brother, Tim! A brother!" She bobbed up and down on the balls of her feet, like an excited child. "And, he's promised to keep my secret from Temper! We'll be our own little family, Russ and I."

Tim could not have said, afterward, what prompted him to look up at exactly that instant; perhaps it was his twin "spidey sense" springing back to life. Whatever alerted him, he raised his head and, scanning the milling crowd, spotted a familiar dark head in a well-known khaki jacket making his way down the midway with, on his left, an equally familiar companion. "J. R.," he said, striving to keep his voice calm and reassuring. "Don't turn around. No, don't! Please." He steered her by the elbow into the deepest shadow he could find and, looking over her shoulder, saw his partners closing in on the ferris wheel.

"Tim? What is it? What's going on?"

"Don't panic, J. R. It's Brennan. She's here."

13. Chapter 13: Confrontation

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 13: Confrontation****

The phone rang, causing Bones to jump and drop the page she'd been holding. Despite disapproving of the J. R. subplot, she'd been caught up in the narrative flow, and was irritated to be interrupted at precisely the point that promised to be the most interesting part of the story. She growled in frustration and picked up the phone. The name on the call screen filled her veins with ice.

"Marianne, what's wrong?"

"Not a thing, darling, relax! We're having the most marvelous time. This zoo is absolutely amazing."

"Oh! All right, thenâ€¦ What can I do for you?"

"Well, since you ask, I wonder: could you do me a tiny favor?"

Bones wasn't comfortable committing herself before knowing what would be required of her, but this was her mother-in-law asking, after all. "Of course, Marianne. If I can."

"Oh, you can, sugar! Listen, what I'd really like is to have Seeley and the kids to myself for just a few more hours. Reggie and I want to take them out to dinner after we're done here. Do you suppose you could spare them, sweetheart? We'd bring some take-out back for you, of course, so you wouldn't have to cook."

This was a ploy that Booth had apparently learned at his mother's knee: to frame as a favor to themselves what was really a favor for the other. "Did Booth put you up to this?"

"Seeley? Why, no, hun! He doesn't even know I'm calling. I wanted to get your okay first."

"Marianneâ€¦ I don't know what to say. Is this really what you want?"

"Tempe, I missed so much time with him, I know I'll never make it all up, but I'll take what I can get. Seeley is all yours, now, I know that, and I couldn't be happier for him, but sometimes a mother just wants to be her boy's number one girl again for a short while. You'll understand someday when Hank brings home the girl he plans to marry."

As Hank was not yet walking on his own, Bones knew that day would be a long time coming. "Well, if you're sureâ€¦"

"Thanks, darling, I owe you one. See you soon." Call ended.

Bones set down her phone, and bending from the waist, retrieved the fallen page. Sons and mothers, mothers and son, she thought. Life can be so strange. She found her place, and resumed reading.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

"Temper? Where?" J. R. shrilled. "Did she see me?"

"No. Hold still. She's walking toward Russ." Vic had stopped further

up the midway, leaving Brennan to confront her brother on her own. Tim couldn't make out their greetings, but their body language spoke of wariness and distance. Poor Russ, what a roller coaster night he was having!

"Tim, we have to get out of here!"

"No, J. R. We stand a better chance of going undetected if we make no sudden moves. Deep breath." He inhaled slowly, and, eyes locked on his, she imitated him. "Okay, now, I'll keep watch, and you, get your glasses back on and take that hairband off your head. That's right, shake out those bangs."

"What's happening?" She stepped up closer and studied his face anxiously.

"They're standing a bit apart from each other, talking back and forth. Russ looks like he'd rather be anywhere else. Wait: she has something for him, too small to make out. He's happy, moves closer, takes it. Brennan's talking, shifting from foot to foot. A short exchange, Russ puts his arm out, andâ€¦"

"What? What?"

"Iâ€¦ I think I might be hallucinating. Brennan just walked into Russ' arms. They're hugging."

"They're _what_?" J. R. spun around, and Tim did nothing to prevent her. She was in no danger of being spotted: Brennan eyes were tightly shut; her entire focus was on Russ.

The same could not be said of Vic, unfortunately. Tim had been so zeroed in on Brennan and Russ that he hadn't noticed his twin approaching. "Hey there, bro!" Vic punched Tim playfully in the shoulder. "What're the chances, right? What brings you out this way? Oh, and, _hey_, " he said, as J. R. shrank away from him and closer to Tim, "Who do we have here, now? Whoa, Tim, you sly bastard! Where've you been hiding this little beauty? The name'sâ€¦"

"Agent Booth," she said, warily. "Vic Booth."

Vic threw back his head and laughed. "I like the sound of that: very double-oh-seven."

"Iâ€¦ I don't know what that means."

"James Bond? International spy and ladykiller? Shaken, not stirred?" When J. R. continued to look incomprehension at him, he said, almost under his breath, "Where'd you find this one, Tim? In a museum?"

Tim was barely listening. Their cover was blown: extraction was now imperative. "Weâ€¦ ahâ€¦ can't talk right now, Vic." He took hold of J. R.'s elbow. "Sorry to rush off like this. It's ââ€¦ a private thing. You understandâ€¦"

"Whoa, there! Easy, boy." Vic help up both hands, palms out. "Where'd you leave your manners? You could at least introduce the lady before running off with her."

There seemed no help for it. "This is J. R., Vic. She works at the

Jeffersonian."

"Pleased to meet you, J. R." He extended his hand, and, after a moment's hesitation, J. R. put hers into it. "Initials only, eh? Always keep 'em guessing, that it? Okay, I'll bite: what does J. R. stand for?"

"Joyless and Ruthless," said a scathing voice from behind him. Vic turned toward it, and there was Brennan, arms tightly crossed over her chest, her face hard with displeasure. She stalked forward and stopped by his side. "Meet my long-lost baby sister, Vic. And, in company with your twin brother, I see. Tim, sweetie, you are an unending source of surprise, generally unwelcome."

Vic had only just picked his jaw up off the ground. "Your sister?" he repeated. "Your twin sister? I can't believe it!"

"You'd see the resemblance if she wasn't trying so very hard to hide it. Look!" Her hand shot out, her fingers found purchase on the bridge of J. R.'s glasses, and she tore them from her sister's face before anyone could stop her. A gasp escaped J. R. and both brothers; then, J. R.'s hands flew up to cover her face, and she turned into Tim with a sob.

"Temperance!" Vic gaped at her, horrified.

She spun toward him, hissing, "I've told you and told you: don't call me that!"

"Because it doesn't suit you, and you know it!" Tim, cradling J. R. in his arms, had never been angrier with Brennan, or with anyone else, in his life. "There is nothing moderate about you, nothing!" he shouted. "You're out of control, Brennan. You need a keeper!"

Brennan regarded him coldly. "And I suppose you think that's a bundle of joy you're clasping to your manly chest? Well, let me burst your bubble, Tim, sweetie: she's the saddest, mopiest, most miserable little crybaby you're ever likely to meet. And, a friend? A boon companion? A Ruth? Please, don't make me laugh. She was never any of those things for me."

"How could she be, when you never let her? You didn't want a friend, you wanted a tame follower with no mind of her own."

Brennan snorted. "I see she's been pouring her venom in your ear, and you, of course, are only too willing to listen. Let me guess: she didn't tell you she got me kicked out of our first foster home?"

"That is so unfair," J. R. moaned.

"So, you can speak after all. Okay, then, little mouse, defend yourself, if you can. Come out from behind your shining white knight, and face the big, bad dragon on your own."

To her credit, J. R. drew herself up and turned to confront her sister, her face wet with tears. Vic reached into his pocket for a handkerchief, and finding one of passable cleanliness, made to lend it to her, but Brennan slapped his hand away. "Stay out of this. One

Booth interfering is bad enough." To J. R., she said, "We're waiting."

"You know very well why you wereâ€¦ placed elsewhere."

"I do, but these gentlemen do not. Explain."

"You blackened my eye, and nearly broke my cheekbone. The swelling didn't go down for a week."

"You didn't!" Vic burst out.

"I did." Brennan did not appear to feel any remorse. "Do you remember _why_ I hit you?"

"Because I couldn't stop crying, even when you warned me what would happen if I didn't."

"_And_, because you kept insisting, even months after their disappearance, that Mom and Dad loved us too much to leave us forever, that they'd come back for us, that we'd be a family again, we only had to be patient and endure."

"I was trying to comfort you," J. R. cried.

"That's rich! As if _you_ were any consolation. _You_ were to blame for their driving off that day in the first place! If they hadn't needed to buy your presentsâ€¦" Suddenly, in mid-diatribes, Brennan's jaw went slack, her eyes showed white around the iris and she stared, speechless, at her sister, as if J. R. now was the dragon with Medusa-like power. "Ohâ€¦ Oh, myâ€¦"

"What? What?" Vic looked from one of them to other. "Somebody tell me what the hell is going on here!"

"Brennan just heard herself, that's all," Tim told him.

And then, because Temperance Brennan was the epitome of unpredictable, when she recovered from her momentary paralysis, she rushed to her sister, pulled her into a tight embrace, and did not let go.

14. Chapter 14: Changes

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 14: Changes****

Bones picked up her pencil, and wrote _Yes!_ in the margin. She was relieved that the sisters' estrangement would not drag on indefinitely. Now that there were two complete sets of twins in play, the tale would likely pick up speed.

As she had her pencil in hand, she decided to jot down two questions that had occurred to her:

â€œ" _interesting that I (represented by the Brennan / J. R. duality) am the only woman (as far as I know) in Booth's sexual history to embody both of his stated "types" (for Vic, the cool,

hard-to-capture, professional woman and for Tim, the emotional, clingy, trouble-plagued woman). Is that what made me "ideal" for him?_

â€" _also, interesting that Tim shows anger (Vic's signature trait) at the carnival while Vic shows distress (Tim's marker). Does this mean the brothers are becoming less different, and therefore closer to re-integrating?_

She held the pencil ready above the page, but no further thoughts came to her, so she set it aside, and resumed her reading.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

When she realized she was squeezing J. R. a trifle too hard, Brennan finally did release her sister, but, from that moment on and in all important respects, she never let go of her again. With Russ in tow, the sisters spent a protracted vacation in North Carolina and, upon their return to the lab, showed unmistakable signs that the breach between them had begun to heal. When their paths crossed during work hours, it was "Dr. Brennan" this, and "Miss Keenan" that, but during their leisure time, J. R. now called Brennan "Tempe" and, as for Brennan, she decided in her brusque way that J. R. was an unnecessarily complicated form of address, and took to calling her simply J., with the result that, in time, casual acquaintances and co-workers, mistaking the initial for a word, thought her name was "Jay."

That was the least of the changes: when the lease on Jay's studio apartment ran out at the end of the summer, Brennan insisted that her twin come share her condo, which, to hear her tell it, had always been far too large for a single occupant anyway. Jay hesitated at first, but she allowed the advantages of a safer neighborhood, larger and better-maintained living quarters and a lower rent to persuade her, and Brennan never gave her cause to regret her decision. As is often the way in these matters, what had started out, on Brennan's part, as an offer prompted as much by a guilty conscience as a charitable impulse ended up benefitting her spectacularly as well. Had Jay not moved in with Brennan, she would not have happened across the rough draft of the next Reichs series novel, would not have asked permission to read it, and would not have suggested revisions which even Brennan's editor applauded as "vast improvements." Thus, serendipitously, Brennan discovered in her sister a valuable beta-reader and not-infrequent collaborator. With Jay's input, Kathy Reichs, Andy Lister and their fictional associates became better-rounded, more recognizably-human characters; novel sales and critical acclaim sky-rocketed. Brennan was quick to acknowledge Jay's contributions, not in the press, certainly, but in the form of bank drafts written out for sums that had Jay's eyes starting from her head.

This financial windfall was, for Jay, just the icing on an already exceptionally sweet cake. Backed by Brennan's support and care, she felt emboldened to dispense with her Diana Prince disguise, stood taller, smiled more often, and took greater pride in her work. Brennan encouraged her to continue her studies, and before long, she received a Master's Degree in anthropology and was subsequently accepted into a doctoral program at a prestigious area university. She would never be the leading light in her chosen field, but her academic work was impeccable and well-received, which was more than

many of her fellow grad students could say.

The Booths were affected by these changes as well, particularly Tim. Vic was, primarily, pleased as punch to have another gorgeous female in his orbit to flirt with, tease and dazzle with his charm. For Tim, Jay had never been just a pretty plaything, but potentially, the love of his life, and that did not change as her confidence in her abilities and her pride in her achievements increased and transformed her into a self-assured professional woman. Indeed, it only served to confirm him in his initial suspicion: she was, indeed, the one.

It was Tim's relationship to Brennan that underwent the bigger change. Since that evening at the carnival, when he had held nothing back of his anger at her, she showed a new respect for him. She listened to him less critically, and even gave indications of seeking his approval. On one memorable afternoon, when Vic, Parker and Jay were frolicking in her building's private swimming pool, Brennan turned to Tim, lounging on a deck chair next to hers, and gestured toward her sister. "I've taken your advice, you see," she said, on a laughing note. "I've found myself a keeper."

Tim had gained a new appreciation for Brennan, too, and he knew, now, what lay beneath her apparent flippancy. "Jay's a salutary influence on you, Brennan, that's true. But, you've done wonders for her, as well," he added in complete sincerity. "The two of you are good for each other."

She did not answer at once, and Tim had already ceased expecting a reply, when she said quietly, in a thick voice, "Thank you, Tim."

So, what had begun in tragedy with the discovery of Christine Brennan's remains culminated, finally, in a revitalization of her dear daughters' lives: the sisters' reconciliation inaugurated for them a period of greater happiness, greater success, greater trust in the others who had stood by, and with, them in their grief and confusion, and, by extension, a greater willingness to take personal risks. Among the beneficiaries of their new openness and flexibility were the Booths.

Their professional and personal bonds with the Brennan girls stronger and surer than ever, the Booth brothers settled down to play what Tim, with his video game background, termed "the long game." Vic had already been playing for a while, and his strategy remained unchanged: he was resolved not to chase Brennan romantically provided she did not run from him professionally, the long-term goal being to wear down her resistance to a romantic relationship so well that she would allow herself, given time, to be caught. Tim's strategy was similar, but with a twist: he was resolved to remain always available to Jay semi-professionally (as an unpaid therapist of sorts) provided that she always ran to him for help and guidance with her personal problems, the long-term goal being to give her time to see in him not only a friend, but the man she loved as well.

Patience is admirable and a great virtue, but sexual frustration exerts a powerful pressure all its own, and, as Vic was obliged to explain to Brennan at one point, their partnership generated a tension that had to be dealt with, creatively if possible. Brennan, who had long considered sex a merely prophylactic practice, actively encouraged him to seek release with suitable partners as she did, and

although it wasn't what he wanted, Vic met his needs in the arms of women who were satisfied with a single night of passion, or less frequently, with women who were happy to indulge in a whirlwind romance. On a number of occasions, he fell into bed with his ex-lover, Rebecca, and for a short while, he reprised his role as Cam Saroyan's friend with benefits. When he sensed that she was beginning to harbor expectations of forever, he broke off their affair. It was then that Cam fully understood what he'd meant when he'd said he was with Brennan all the way.

As best friend and life coach, Tim was painfully privy to the rather disastrous sexual encounters and doomed love affairs into which Jay threw herself. Her taste in men was certifiably atrocious: she was seduced with sob stories, taken advantage of by players, strung along by closeted gays, and used as a doormat by narcissists. Again and again, she would bring her broken and bleeding heart to him, like a bird with a tattered wing that only he could mend. Jay would cry on his shoulder, and Tim would let himself hope that, this time, she would finally see that the right man for her, the man who would love her as she deserved, was right under her tear-reddened nose. While he waited for her to have her epiphany, he had a string of one night stands with young women who thought he was adorable and wanted to cuddle him, or older women who would simply not take "no" for an answer. They were physically-gratifying hook-ups, but Tim felt more heart-sick after them than he had before.

This fundamentally unsatisfying but stable state of affairs wherein Vic and Tim gave their bodies to interchangeable women and held their damaged hearts in reserve for the Brennan twins might have limped on forever except for the advent of a very credible threat to their precarious equilibrium. Enter the Captain.

15. Chapter 15: Competition

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 15: Competition****

Bones was intrigued to discover who the so-called "captain" might be (another made-up secondary character?), but she wanted to write down just a few impressions before they slipped her mind:

â€" _interesting that each "sister" loses an "r" from the end of her name. Does this signify that Temper has lost some of her Rage and J. R. some of her Regret?_

â€" _Tim and Brennan have found some common ground at last, and Vic and Jay seem to have a cordial relationship. Moving closer to reconciliation of opposites?_

â€" _the "long game" metaphor works well as a unifying motif. What does it mean in video-game terminology?_

She stuck her pencil behind her ear, and resumed reading.

A Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

The Booth brothers were colleagues of Agent Tim "Sully" Sullivan long before he became the skipper of his own charter boat. They considered

him a thoroughly good guy and an outstanding g-man. Brown-haired and brown-eyed with an athletic physique, Sully's good-looks were more generic than jaw-dropping, at least until he flashed his dimples. While Vic's charm was normally set at full-blast, Sully's brand was more of the understated variety but no less devastating for all that. His courteous, considerate manner, keen sense of humor and quiet confidence made him a favorite with the ladies, most of whom were not put off by what his FBI nickname of "Peanut" suggested about his manly parts.

Whatever insecurity Vic might have harbored about his personal relationship with Brennan, he had absolute confidence in their professional bond, to the point, indeed, of complacency. Prevented on account of disciplinary action from investigating a homicide in the swamplands of Florida, he suffered not the least qualm in learning that his friend Tim Sullivan would be working the case with his partner. When, initially, Brennan expressed reservations regarding his replacement's qualifications, Vic was generous in his praise, recommending Sully as an excellent agent with wide experience, entirely worthy of her trust. He doubtless would have been far less complimentary if he'd had the slightest inkling that Sully would soon be entering the race as a serious candidate for Brennan's heart.

Shocked as he was at first to discover the two were dating, Vic was not greatly dismayed. Brennan had her flings, just as he did; the affair would run its course, and, when it was over, he and Brennan would resume their partnership as though nothing had happened. He schooled himself to be patient and endure, but Sully didn't make it easy. He was not one of the typical losers Brennan wasted her time on; no, he was a stand-up guy, so much so, in fact, that he made sure he was not cutting Vic out before he pressed his suit. Vic denied any interest, of course — he was bound by his long-term strategy — but Sully wasn't fooled. Still, Vic had, in effect, taken himself out of the running, and Sully needed no further encouragement to initiate his own chase.

It was a testament to Sully's commitment to Brennan that he befriended Jay as well. Not long after Sully became her boyfriend, Brennan, along with the Booths, was called to investigate first one homicide and then another two that, in their particulars, were faithful copies of the three murders in her recently-released novel, Red Tape, White Bones. Clinical Brennan was able, to some degree, to distance herself from the crimes, arguing that the killings would have taken place in any event, just in a different form, but Jay could not be so sanguine. She was distraught to think that anything she'd had a hand in creating could have been turned to such a depraved purpose, and she often succumbed to tears in consequence. Sully would hold and soothe her, assuring her over and over that she was not at fault, that she'd done nothing wrong. He was protective of her as well: without being asked, Sully escorted Jay to Brennan's book-signing and did not stray a moment from her side the entire evening. He did not protest even when, in her nervousness, she clung like a limpet to his arm.

As Sully horned in on their investigations and usurped their roles with the Brennan twins, Vic and Tim found themselves increasingly in the unenviable position of helpless observers. Tim had inhabited this role many times in his life, and so had the advantage over Vic, who was twitchy and chafed to find himself standing on the sideline. In

his anxiety, Vic started behaving badly: inserting himself where he wasn't wanted, taking cheap shots at his rival, and generally acting like a dog in a manger. His heart soared with gladness to see Brennan and Sully argue, or to hear Sully acknowledge that Vic and Brennan made a great team, but it plummeted like a stone to see how eager she was to return to her vacationing boyfriend, or to realize he ceased to exist for her when Sully walked into the room. And, to look up, all unsuspecting, that evening they'd solved the case, only to witness her kissing Sully with obvious abandon had torn him up inside.

As he saw less of Sully and Jay together, Tim's pain was not as great as Vic's, but he was sore enough, knowing that Jay often turned to Sully for comfort, to reply somewhat testily when Sully asked him how Jay was holding up, "Why don't you ask her yourself?" He was immediately ashamed of his meanness, which Sully had done nothing to deserve, and, in an effort to make amends, offered Sully his best piece of advice concerning Brennan: "Don't let her bully you into leaving her." He couldn't say fairer than that.

When his efforts to lure Brennan off Sully's boat and into the lab met with limited success or failed entirely, Vic knew he was in serious jeopardy of losing his partner for good. His worst fears were confirmed soon after when Tim informed him that Sully had asked Brennan to sail away with him to warm Caribbean seas, and that she had not summarily refused him. Vic dropped his head in his hands. "God, Tim! This can't be happening!"

"Jay says it's only for a year. Brennan needs a break, Vic. She'll take a sabbatical, get away from gory corpses for a while, clear her mind.â€|"

Vic raised his head and looked at his brother bleakly. "What about Jay? She going along?"

Tim nodded. "You know Brennan can't be parted from her. Besides, they've just started work on the next Reichs book. They need to stay together."

"Soâ€|" Vic breathed in deeply, sighed. "You're the shrink, here, Tim, the guy with the answers. So, counselor, counsel me: what the hell am I supposed to do?"

"What do you want?"

"Oh, no! No! None of that psychologist-couch crap. Straight-up question, straight-up answer. Lay it on me."

"You want my advice? Let her go."

Vic threw up his hands in disgust. "Really, Tim? After all this time, the same old tune?"

Tim felt his cheeks grow hot. "The tune might be the same, Vic, but not the lyrics."

"Jeez, I really hate when you speak Hallmark. English!"

"All right, have it your way. It's true I thought, at first, Brennan was all wrong for you. I had her pegged as a heartless ball-breaker,

a first-class bitch. I know better now; I know her. She has a real chance for happiness with Sully, Vic. He's not like you and me: he has a sound heart to offer, a whole heart." He let the words sink in for a moment, then went on, "I answered your question. Now, here's one for you: would you rather Brennan run off and be happy with Sully, or stay here and be miserable with you?"

Vic regarded his twin unhappily. "Are those my only options?"

Tim did not dignify that question with a reply. "Cut her loose, Vic. If she asks your opinion, tell her to go, spread her wings, live large. She's only promising a year. Give her the chance to come back to you."

Vic laughed, a short, bitter sound. "Yeah, like that worked so well with Mom."

"Brennan isn't Mom, Vic. She's her own person, a wild card. If you love her, Vic, really love her—"

"Don't! Just don't say 'set her free.' If you start quoting Sting at me, so help me God, I'm going to punch your lights out."

Vic lay in bed that night, haunted by Tim's question. He turned it over and over in his mind, coming at it from one way, then another. He tried picturing Brennan smiling, the breeze lifting her hair as the boat motored through waters as blue as her eyes; he tried imagining himself collaring bad guys without her, or with some hot-babe agent who would stay behind him and let him be the gun for a change. When he tried placing himself on the dock watching her form gradually diminish as she stood waving from the stern, he felt an anguish so keen, he couldn't catch his breath. Every instinct in him rebelled at the thought of letting her go. But then, he pictured Brennan on the dock, watching Sully sail toward the horizon with the same searing pain in her heart, and he knew: if one of them had to endure that kind of suffering, better that it be him, far better.

When, as Tim had foreseen, Brennan asked for his take on Sully's invitation, Vic had his answer ready and was able, due to that preparation, to say with a tolerable show of nonchalance and friendly disinterest that she should go. She seemed not entirely satisfied with his advice, and looked on the point of extending the conversation, but just at the moment, the techs called for their attention, and the subject was dropped, for good.

That evening, Vic replayed the scene for Tim, who then took his life in his hands and gave his brother a one-armed hug. "I'm proud of you, Vic."

"Yeah? Well, just so you know: that doesn't make it hurt any less."

"That pain you're feeling, bro? It's the shell around your heart thinning, just a little."

"That right? Well, looks to me your heart's scarring over here and there." Vic shrugged his brother off, and went to see a fridge about some beer.

"What'll it be, Tim?" Vic asked, handing him a bottle. "Does she go or stay? What's your gut tell you?"

Tim's gut was unforthcoming.

16. Chapter 16: Confidence

****What He Offered****

****Chapter 16: Confidence****

Bones took a moment to remember that long-ago morning: there had, indeed, been a breeze ruffling her hair but it had been chill, and Sully had been at the controls, not in the stern. She recalled wondering, as he waved one last time before turning his face resolutely toward the sea, if she would ever see him again, the dear man. To date, she had had not so much as a glimpse of him, and he'd never phoned from Turks and Caicos, or sent a post card wishing she were there. It was as if, like some ancient flat-earthers were reputed to have feared, he had sailed to the end of the earth and right over its far edge. Would they have made a go of it, they two? She would never know now, but she did not regret the lost opportunity. She had everything she wanted, here and now, including more pages of Booth's story.

The Tale of Twin Booths, cont'd

Ultimately, it was both Vic and Brennan standing on the dock, waving good-bye: she at the far end, watching somewhat sadly as Sully steered the Temperance out of the bay toward open seas, and he, trying to mask his joy, waiting at the shore end to offer whatever comfort his company and a hot breakfast could supply. She didn't welcome the sight of him, and she was to remain touchy and disagreeable for days, but she hadn't left him, not professionally, and Vic, after the scare he'd been through, found that more than sufficed. The long game was back on.

Jay had phoned the previous evening with news of the decision, and she was still excited the next morning when, as arranged, Tim came round to the condo carrying a box full of frosted muffins from the boutique bakery they both favored. The table had been set as for a party with a gaily-colored cloth and matching napkins, gentian-blue stoneware mugs and dishes, and a vase full of daisies in pride of place. He surrendered the box to his hostess, and gestured to the table. "What's the occasion?"

She snipped the twine, and raised the box lid, all with a huge smile on her face. "It's a celebration, Tim! Sit, sit! The coffee's ready. I'll just put these on a platter."

Disregarding her instructions, Tim collected the thermal carafe from the counter, carried it to the dining area, and poured for both of them. He was just making room on the table for the baked goods when she walked up with the cut-glass cake stand piled with muffins. "Oh, thank you, Tim! No, sit, I tell you! I can pull out my own chair!"

He waited until she had slipped into her seat before taking his place at the table. "I'm going to go out on a limb, here, and guess you're

glad not to be leaving D. C."

"Oh, Tim! I know I'm terrible! I shouldn't be happy when Tempe's so upset, but I can't help what I feel."

"No, no, of course not." He watched her tip three teaspoonfuls of sugar into her coffee, then ventured, "Is Brennan unhappy, then? Don't tell me, if you think by doing so you're betraying her confidence."

"Tempe's all over the map, as usual." Tim had the sudden urge to remark that Tempe was, actually, in Arizona, but he resisted. "Let's see: she's sorry she disappointed Sully, who, as you know, is a _very _nice guy. She feels a little bit guilty, too, because she thinks she might have led him on, which, as I told her, is absolutely ridiculous. What else? She's kind of mad at me for not hiding my lack of enthusiasm very well, andâ€¦ oh! She's really angry at Vic."

Tim nearly choked on his muffin. He reached for his coffee, and washed the crumb down. "She's pissed off at Vic? Ohâ€¦ er, pardon my French."

She waved off his apology. "To be fair, she's miffed at you and Angela, too. She wanted you all to make a big fuss: cry, moan, gnash your teeth, that kind of thing. She was waiting for someone to say, 'Hell, _no_, you can't go! What are you thinking? You're indispensable, the Jeffersonian will go into the tank without you, the FBI will never catch a murderer again!' You get the idea."

It was all Tim could do not to gape at her. "You're joking!"

Jay popped a bite of muffin in her mouth, and chewed thoughtfully. "Joking? No. Exaggerating? Maybe. Basically, she feels unappreciated. It was like when we were in school: Tempe could join a group usually, but if she wandered off, nobody objected. Nobody called after her, 'Hey, where're you going? Come back! We need you.' I guess this time, with her lab family, she thought things would be different."

"Jeez!" Tim shook his head in disbelief. "And, here we all were bending over backwards trying to put her happiness first. So much for good intention." He pondered the perversity of human nature as he stirred a few more drops of cream into his coffee. "If she's as peeved as you say, I wonder she didn't sail off with Sully just for spite."

"That's more something _I _would do. Tempe's too rational, and beside, it wouldn't have been fair to Sully. He deserved to be chosen on his own merits."

"She didn't choose him, though." Tim knew he was on the verge of prying, and though he tried to rein in his curiosity, the struggle was short-lived. "I suppose she didn't love him, or didn't love him enough."

"Oh, I don't know." Jay picked up her napkin, and was suddenly engrossed in wiping her fingertips clean. "It might just be the opposite, Tim. Tempe's always telling me I shy away from successful, charismatic career-men likeâ€¦ like Sully because I don't feel worthy of men like that, I'm not enoughâ€¦ woman, I guess. She's never said so, but I think, deep down, maybe Tempe feels the same way: you know,

lacking in some way. If Sully hadn't asked her to decide so soon, if he'd given her more time to grow confident in her ability to offer him as much as he offered her, I think things might have worked out between them."

This was a speech so rich in potential significance that Tim, for a moment, couldn't get a handle on it all. To cover his confusion, he joked, "For a woman who hates psychology as much as Brennan, she sure engages in lots of analysis."

Jay looked up at him from under her lashes, and smiled. "It's your influence, Tim. Sometimes she sounds just like you, I swear!"

If Jay only knew the effect those smiles of hers had on him—or, was it possible? "You know, you never did say why you weren't thrilled to go off on a year-long cruise. I thought you liked Sully."

"Oh, as far as that goes, Sully's a prince. I absolutely adore him, only—not as much as—" She lowered her eyes, caught her bottom lip between her teeth, and started to smooth the napkin she had just been rumpling.

Tim's heart was beating a rapid tattoo. "Are you saying you're interested?" He cleared his throat. "Interested in someone here in D. C.?" A tiny nod: yes. "Anyone I know?" Another tiny nod. "Can you tell me?"

She shook her head decidedly. "Please, don't ask, Tim. I shouldn't have said anything. Tempe tells me I'm mistaking kindness for attraction, that I have to really work on myself before a man like—like him would want a serious relationship with me."

Tim felt his old dislike of Brennan rising up in him again. How dare she undermine her sister's self-esteem? "Jay, Brennan has no business running you down!"

"Tim!" Jay raised her head, and turning toward him, laid her hand on his forearm. "Please, stop! Tempe's right; I know she is. Just now, I don't have the confidence, or self-respect to be any man's equal partner, but, thanks to you and Tempe, I've come a long way already, and I'm going to be a strong, independent woman someday." She leaned toward him confidentially, and whispered, "I'm training to be badass, Tim."

They laughed together, and the moment for sharing secrets passed. They polished off a few more muffins, packed the remainder away for Vic and Brennan, and, after having cleaned up their mess, headed off for an afternoon's wandering through the exhibit halls of the Jeffersonian.

When Tim reflected on Jay's revelations later, he drew an encouraging lesson from Sully's failure to woo Brennan. He had heard Sully say, "Brennan's the go-slow type," so he had, obviously, understood the paramount importance of patience. But, in the end, Sully had been unable to wait, he had pressed for an answer too soon. Tim was more than ever convinced that he and Vic were on the right track: the long game was the best strategy. They had only to be patient and endure.

Patience is an admirable quality and a great virtue, but it can be sorely tried, and Sully was just the first of many hard tests the Booths had to face as their long game unfolded down the months and years. There were many times when one or the other twin was strongly tempted to give up, as when Tim discovered Jay was dating, simultaneously, a well-muscled deep sea welder and an effeminate botanist, or when Vic had to stand by and watch Brennan welcome the effusive attentions of Deputy Director Andrew Hacker. They had their own low points, too, as when Tim, recovering from brain-tumor surgery, didn't know for certain which of the Brennan twins he loved, or when Vic, having had to take a life in the line of duty, was tormented by guilt. They were often, separately or together, pushed to their limits, but then, there would come an unlooked-for buss on the cheek, a perfunctory kiss under the mistletoe that was anything but, and the odd undercover case where they were free, because in character, to offer and receive the physical affection they craved. They made these very small comforts go a long way, they kept their eyes on the long-term prize, and they endured. Over time, in a process so gradual as to be imperceptible, the shell around Vic's heart thinned to near transparency and the largest wounds in Tim's heart scabbed over: their hearts were all but healed.

There came a moment, finally, when the long game appeared on the point of paying off. It felt to Vic and Tim as though they were in the final seconds of regulation, racing toward the wide open goal, the longstanding tie about to be broken at last! And then, cruel Fate came out of nowhere and blocked the winning slap shot just as time ran out: game over. Final score: two to two.

Calamity Day had been bad, very bad. But, the night the buzzer sounded on the long game was far, far worse. It was a Catastrophe.

Bones rapidly turned the page. There was one last sheet of paper in her lap. Smack dab in the center, all in upper-case letters were four short words:

END OF PART ONE

End
file.